

QuEST

Quality Enhancement and Standards Team

UWS Complaints Handling Procedure

Part 4: Governance

UNIVERSITY OF THE
WEST *of* SCOTLAND

UWS

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Staff roles and responsibilities and guidance on recording, reporting, publicising and learning from complaints.

Roles and responsibilities

All staff will be aware of:

- the Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP);
- how to handle and record complaints at the frontline response stage;
- who they can refer a complaint to, in case they are not able to handle the matter;
- the need to try and resolve complaints early and as close to the point of service delivery as possible; and
- their clear authority to attempt to resolve any complaints they may be called upon to deal with.

Training on this procedure will be part of the induction process for all new staff. Refresher training will be provided for current staff on a regular basis.

We will ensure that staff are appropriately trained when dealing with complaints, e.g. in cases involving harassment.

Senior management will ensure that:

- UWS's final position on a complaint investigation is signed off by an appropriate manager or officer in order to provide assurance that this is the definitive response of UWS and that the complainant's concerns have been taken seriously;
- it maintains overall responsibility and accountability for the management and governance of complaints handling (including complaints about contracted services);
- it has an active role in, and understanding of, the CHP (although not necessarily involved in the decision-making process of complaint handling);
- mechanisms are in place to ensure a consistent approach to the way complaints handling information is managed, monitored, reviewed and reported at all levels in UWS; and
- complaints information is used to improve services, and this is evident from regular publications.

The Principal and Senior management will ensure that:

- there is an effective CHP with a robust investigation process which demonstrates that organisational learning is in place. The Principal may delegate responsibility for the procedure, but must receive assurance of complaints performance by way of regular reporting;
- complaints are used to identify service improvements, and that these improvements are implemented, and learning fed back to the wider organisation as appropriate;
- the University's final position on a complaint investigation is signed off by an appropriate senior officer in order to provide assurance that this is the definitive response of the University and that the complainant's concerns have been taken seriously;
- it maintains overall responsibility and accountability for the management and governance of complaints handling within the University;
- it has an active role in, and understanding of, the CHP (although not necessarily involved in the decision-making process of complaints handling);
- mechanisms are in place to ensure a consistent approach to the way complaints handling information is managed, monitored, reviewed and reported at all levels in the University, and
- complaints information is used to improve services, and this is evident from regular publications.

QuEST (Quality Enhancement and Standards Team)

At UWS, QuEST is responsible for coordinating both the Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints processes.

Complaint Investigator:

A Complaint Investigator is a suitably trained member of staff responsible for the conduct of the complaints investigation and is involved in the investigation and the co-ordination of all aspects of the response to the complainant.

- A Stage 1 investigator is a senior member of staff within a School, Professional Services area or Partner Institution. They are responsible for dealing with the Stage 1 complaints about their School, Professional Services Department or Partner Institution and reporting the outcomes to the complainant and to QuEST via complaints@uws.ac.uk.
- A Stage 2 Complaint Investigator is responsible for managing a Stage 2 investigation. This includes the preparation of an Investigation Findings report, including details of any recommended procedural changes to service delivery.

At both Stages 1 and 2, only colleagues with a sound knowledge of the subject matter will be asked to investigate complaints, e.g. knowledge of programmes of study at PhD level.

UWS's SPSO Liaison Officer

The University's Appeals & Conduct Officer's role includes providing complaints information in an orderly, structured way within requested timescales, providing comments on factual accuracy on our behalf in response to SPSO reports, and confirming and verifying that recommendations have been implemented.

Recording, reporting, learning from and publicising complaints

Complaints provide valuable feedback. One of the aims of the CHP is to identify opportunities to improve services across UWS. By recording and analysing complaints data, we can identify and address the causes of complaints and, where appropriate, identify training opportunities and introduce service improvements.

We also have arrangements in place to ensure complaints about contractors are recorded, reported on and publicised in line with this CHP.

Recording complaints

It is important to record suitable data to enable us to fully investigate and respond to the complaint, as well as using our complaint information to track themes and trends. As a minimum, we should record:

- the complainant's name and contact details;
- the date the complaint was received;
- the nature of the complaint;
- the service the complaint refers to;
- staff member responsible for handling the complaint;
- action taken and outcome at frontline response stage;
- date the complaint was closed at the frontline response stage;
- date the investigation stage was initiated (if applicable);
- action taken and outcome at investigation stage (if applicable);
- date the complaint was closed at the investigation stage (if applicable); and
- the underlying cause of the complaint and any remedial action taken.
- the outcome of the SPSO's investigation (where applicable).

If the complainant does not want to provide any of this information, we will reassure them that it will be managed appropriately, and record what we can.

Individual complaint files will be stored in line with the [UWS records retention schedules](#).

Learning from complaints

We must have clear systems in place to act on issues identified in complaints. As a minimum, we must:

- seek to identify the root cause of complaints;
- take action to reduce the risk of recurrence; and
- systematically review complaints performance reports to improve service delivery.

Learning may be identified from individual complaints (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld or not) and from analysis of complaints data.

Where we have identified the need for service improvement in response to an individual complaint, we will take appropriate action.

The process for learning from complaints includes:

- the action needed to improve services must be authorised by an appropriate manager;
- an officer (or team) should be designated the 'owner' of the issue, with responsibility for ensuring the action is taken;
- a target date must be set for the action to be taken;
- the designated individual must follow up to ensure that the action is taken within the agreed timescale;
- where appropriate, performance in the School/Professional Service area should be monitored to ensure that the issue has been resolved; and
- any learning points should be shared with relevant staff.

Senior management will review the information reported on complaints regularly to ensure that any trends or wider issues which may not be obvious from individual complaints are quickly identified and addressed. Where we identify the need for service improvement, we will take appropriate action (as set out above). Where appropriate, performance in the School/Professional Service area should be monitored to ensure that the issue has been resolved.

Reporting of complaints and Publicising complaints information

We have a process for the reporting of complaints information, including analysis of complaints trends. Regularly reporting the analysis of complaints information helps to inform management of where services need to improve.

The above will include the recording of complaints in relation to harassment.

Quarterly reports

We publish on a quarterly basis information on complaints outcomes and actions taken to improve services.

The information reported quarterly to senior management includes:

- Performance statistics (in line with the complaints performance indicators published by SPSO), detailing complaints volumes, types and key performance information, for example on time taken and stage at which complaints were resolved.
- The trends and outcomes of complaints and the actions taken in response, highlighting where there are areas where few or no complaints are received, which may indicate either good practice or that there are barriers to complaining in that area.

This demonstrates the improvements resulting from complaints and shows that complaints can help to improve our services. It also helps ensure transparency in our complaints handling service and will help to show that we value complaints.

Annual Report

The University reports on complaints handling performance annually in line with SPSO requirements. This includes performance statistics showing the volume and type of complaints and key performance details, for example on the time taken and the stage at which complaints were resolved.

We will publish an annual complaints performance report on our website in line with SPSO requirements and provide this to the SPSO on request. This summarises and builds on the quarterly reports we have produced about our services. It includes:

- performance statistics, in line with the complaints performance indicators published by the SPSO; and
- complaint trends and the actions that have been or will be taken to improve services as a result.

These reports must be easily accessible to members of the public and available in alternative formats as requested.

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