

‘the advice hub’
Your Union Your Support

Guide to...
Complaints
2013-14



What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction. If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of your experience at Heriot-Watt, whether it relates to academic provisions such as lecturers, support staff and supervisors or other services (such as halls of residence, catering, Student Support Services etc.), there are number of ways for you to raise your concerns.

Why should I complain?

No service is perfect: mistakes can happen and things might need to be arranged better. The Students' Union encourages students to let the University know if things can be improved. If no one is aware of a problem then it cannot be fixed. If there is real justification for a complaint then you are helping yourself and future students.

How should I raise a complaint?

You can raise a complaint in person, by phone or in writing, which can be by mail or e-mail. However, it is advised that you complete a University Complaints Form available at <http://www.hw.ac.uk/registry/complaints.htm>. This will help to ensure that all aspects of the complaint are understood by the

University. It is important to provide as much information as possible about what has gone wrong and how you would like the complaint to be resolved.

It is easier for the University to resolve complaints if they are made quickly and directly. However, you have normally up to 6 months to make the complaint after finding out about the matter.

The University understands that there may be times when you are unable or reluctant to make a complaint yourself. Therefore, the University will accept a complaint from another person who you choose to be your representative. If you want another person to make the complaint on your behalf, you must provide the University with written consent to confirm that you are happy for another individual to do this.

Stages of complaint

The University Complaints Procedure has two stages:

Stage one: Frontline resolution and *Stage two:* Investigation.

Stage 1: Frontline resolution

This stage is used where it is possible to resolve a complaint quickly and from the area in which the service was provided. Where possible, you should raise the complaint with the relevant staff member directly or with the member of staff responsible for that area of operation.

If you wish to raise a Stage one complaint you should complete the relevant University Complaint Form available at <http://www.hw.ac.uk/registry/complaints.htm>.

You will receive a decision on a complaint raised at Stage one within five working days, unless there are exceptional circumstances. The result might be an immediate explanation - and/or apology if something has clearly gone wrong - and action being taken to resolve the problem.

The University will also provide information on the opportunity to take the complaint to stage two should you remain dissatisfied with the decision at Stage one. This can be done either immediately or shortly after receiving notification of the decision.

Stage 2: Investigation

This covers two types of complaint:

1. Those that have not been resolved to your satisfaction at Stage one and where you wish to take the complaint further.
2. Those that involve complex issues and require a detailed investigation from the start.

If you wish to raise a Stage two complaint you should complete the relevant University Complaint Form available at <http://www.hw.ac.uk/registry/complaints.htm>. On receipt of a Stage two student complaint, the University will acknowledge receipt within three working days and arrange a discussion with you or your representative based on the content of the Complaints Form, including the outcome sought. This discussion will outline what will happen next.

The University will provide a full response to the complaint within 20 working days, unless there are complications which makes this timescale impossible to achieve. If the investigation will take longer than 20 working days to resolve, the University will let you know, agree revised time scales for resolution and keep you updated.

What if I am still dissatisfied?

If you remain dissatisfied with the decision or the way in which the complaint has been dealt with by the University's internal procedures, you have the right to ask the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO) www.spsso.org.uk to look at it. For further information please contact the Advice Hub or visit

Further questions?

For more detailed information on the Complaints Process, please read the University's Complaints Policy, Procedures and Guidelines available at: <http://www.hw.ac.uk/registry/complaints.htm> or come in to talk to an advisor in the Advice Hub.

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