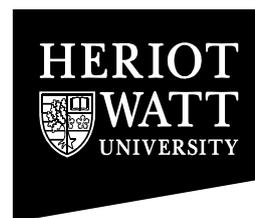


A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

HERIOT-WATT UNIVERSITY COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURES -



Heriot-Watt University is committed to providing an excellent education and high quality services to its students, from enrolment through to graduation. The University values complaints which are raised, using the information gained to help improve services. The Complaints Policy and Procedures apply to all services provided by Heriot-Watt University, including the Edinburgh Business School, and the Dubai and Malaysia Campuses.

This leaflet accords with guidance from the Office of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), provides information on Heriot-Watt University's Complaints Policy and Procedures, and explains how to make a complaint. Comprehensive information is provided in the Policy and Procedures documents which are available at <http://www.hw.ac.uk/students/studies/complaints/complaints.htm>.

What is a complaint?

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction about action or lack of action taken by the University or about the standard of service provided by the University or by others on behalf of the University.

What issues might be addressed by raising a complaint?

Complaints can be made about issues such as:

- the quality and standard of service or failure to provide a service. This includes academic services and personal support services.
- the quality of facilities or learning resources
- the quality and standard of administrative processes
- inappropriate behaviour/ attitude or treatment by a member of staff, another student or a contractor.

A complaint may involve more than one of the services provided by the University or be about someone working on behalf of Heriot-Watt University.

Where a complaint relates to services provided by HWU with another organisation, or another organisation on behalf of HWU, (for example, a partner institution or contractor), the SPSO advises that the University Policy and the accompanying Procedures (including timescales for investigation) must apply. The SPSO has confirmed that complaints may be raised with the SPSO (following exhaustion of internal University procedures) in “relation to rights or obligations which accrued or arose in the UK.” Complainants from outside the UK can ask the SPSO to consider their case in such circumstances.

Collective Complaints

Collective complaints will be managed on a case-by-case basis depending on the nature of the complaint. Such complaints will be managed by one relevant member of staff to ensure consistency of approach and outcome. Each individual member of the collective complaint must provide their individual details and signature as required on the complaints submission forms, together with independent confirmation of their support for the substance of the complaint, and willingness to fully engage with its investigation. A collective complaint will be managed in the same way as an individual complaint, in accordance with and as outlined in the University Complaints Policy and Procedures.

What issues may not be raised as complaints?

There are some matters that cannot be considered through the University’s Complaints Policy and Procedures. These include:

- a routine first-time request for a service
- a request under Freedom of Information or Data Protection legislation
- a request for information or an explanation of policy or practice
- requests for compensation from the University
- a response to an invitation to provide feedback through a formal mechanism such as a questionnaire/survey or through committee membership
- an insurance claim
- an issue which is being, or has been, considered by a court or tribunal
- an academic appeal (ie which relates to academic judgement)
- an attempt to have a complaint reconsidered where the University’s procedures have been exhausted and a final decision has been

given following investigation. If a student remains dissatisfied at this stage, the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) can be asked to undertake an independent review of the complaint.

There may be other Policies and Procedures within the University that are more relevant in helping to resolve concerns students may have than the Complaints Policy and Procedures. If the University Complaints Policy and Procedures do not seem to apply to a particular concern, advice can be obtained from the student's academic department, student service sections or the Student Union Hub (based at the Edinburgh Campus) on how best to take the matter forward.

Who can complain?

Any individual who is enrolled as a student of Heriot-Watt University, no matter where they are based or how they are studying, and who receives, requests or is directly affected by the services of Heriot-Watt University has a right to raise a complaint with the University, as long as the complaint does not involve questioning academic judgement. This may include a representative of someone who is dissatisfied with the services provided.

A student may also request that a complaint is raised on their behalf by another individual. The University will consider such a complaint if the student has given their personal written consent to the University to proceed in this manner (see section below on 'Getting help to make a complaint').

How should a complaint be raised?

A student can raise a complaint in person, by phone, in writing/ via email. Completing the University Complaints Form (<http://www.hw.ac.uk/students/studies/complaints/complaints.htm>) helps to ensure that all aspects of the complaint are clearly understood by the University and to know what outcome the student would like. It is important to provide as much information as possible about what has gone wrong/ the substance of the complaint.

It is easier for the University to resolve complaints if they are made quickly and directly to the service provider concerned. Speaking to local staff within the Department about which the complaint is being made will help the University to try to resolve any problems at the earliest possible opportunity.

Getting help to make a complaint

The University understands that there may be times when a student is unable or reluctant to make a complaint themselves. In view of this, the University will accept complaints from a representative of the student who is dissatisfied with a service provided. The University will require written consent from the student complainant to confirm that they are content for the other individual to act on their behalf with respect to the complaint.

If a student wishes to seek assistance or guidance in raising a complaint, it may be useful to contact the Heriot-Watt University Student Union <http://www.hwunion.com>; asc@hwunion.com.

What is the timescale for raising a complaint?

Normally, a student should raise a complaint within six months of finding out about the matter. In exceptional circumstances, a complaint will be accepted after the time limit. The student will be asked to confirm why the time limit should not apply in such cases.

What happens when a complaint has been made?

Confirmation will be provided on who is dealing with a complaint.

The University Complaints Procedure has two stages, either of which may be relevant to the matter the student wishes to raise:

- Stage one – frontline resolution
- Stage two - Investigation

Students who wish to raise a complaint at either Stage one or Stage two should complete the relevant University Complaint Form. This is particularly important for complaints which are complex and which require detailed investigation. Completion of the form will help students to state their complaint clearly and help the University to gain a better understanding of the issues. Students may wish to raise the complaint initially in person or by phone. However, subsequent completion of the Complaints Form will aid clarity and the review process.

Stage one – frontline resolution

This stage of the procedure is relevant where it is possible to resolve complaints quickly and from the area in which the service was provided. The

result might be an immediate explanation - and/or apology if something has clearly gone wrong - and action being taken to resolve the problem. Where possible, the complaint should be raised with the relevant staff member directly or with the member of staff responsible for that area of operation.

The University will provide a decision on a complaint raised at Stage one within five working days, unless there are exceptional circumstances. The University will also provide information on the opportunity to take the complaint to the next stage of the Procedures should a student remain dissatisfied with the outcome decision relating to Stage one. This can be done either immediately or shortly after receiving notification of the decision.

Stage two – investigation

Stage two of the University Student Complaints Procedures covers two types of complaint:

- those that have not been resolved at Stage one to the satisfaction of the student and the student chooses to take the complaint to Stage two; and
- those that involve complex issues and require detailed investigation from the start.

On receipt of a Stage two student complaint, the University will:

- acknowledge receipt within three working days
- arrange a discussion with the student based on the content of the Complaints Form, including the outcome sought, and to outline the process going forward
- 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 the student know, agree revised time scales for resolution and keep the student updated on progress.

What if a student remains dissatisfied?

After a complaint has exhausted the University's internal procedures, if a student remains dissatisfied with the decision or the way in which the complaint has been dealt with, the student has a right to ask the SPSO to look at it.

The SPSO **cannot** normally look at:

- a complaint that has not completed the University's internal Complaints Procedures. It is therefore important to make sure that the internal processes have been completed before contacting the SPSO
- complaints that arose, or that a student became aware of, more than a year ago
- a matter that has been or is being considered in a court of law.

A student can contact the SPSO:

In Person:

SPSO

4 Melville Street

Edinburgh

EH3 7NS

By Post

SPSO

Freepost EH641

Edinburgh

EH3 0BR

Freephone: 0800 377 7330

Online contact www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us

Website: www.spsso.org.uk

Mobile site: <http://m.spsso.org.uk>

Equality Commitments

Heriot-Watt University is committed to making its services easy to use for all students. In line with its statutory equalities duties, the University will always ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to help students access and use the University's services.

This leaflet can be provided in other formats (such as large print, audio and Braille) by contacting disability@hw.ac.uk or 00 44 (0) 131 451 3386. If students have trouble putting complaints in writing, please contact the University Complaints Officer (contact details below).

Heriot-Watt University is committed to ensuring that no student who raises a genuine complaint will be penalised. For example, members of staff involved in handling the various stages of the Complaints Procedures are specifically required to ensure that the action of raising a complaint does not influence the assessment of a student's academic work or the manner in which the student is treated.

Confidentiality

Complaints will be handled with an appropriate level of confidentiality and information will only be released to those who need it for the purposes of investigating or responding to the complaint. No third party will be told more about the investigation than is strictly necessary in order to obtain the information required from them.

Contact for Student Complaints

Contact details for further information on the Heriot-Watt University Complaints Policy and Procedures, including this leaflet:

Paul Travill
University Complaints Officer
Academic Registrar
Heriot-Watt University
complaints@hw.ac.uk
00 44 (0)131 451 3368

August 2013

Quick guide to Heriot-Watt University Complaints Procedures

Complaints Procedures

Complaints can be raised in person, by phone, by e-mail or in writing.

The University has a **two-stage complaints procedure**. The University will try to deal with complaints quickly where this is possible. If the matter requires detailed investigation, it will be considered at Stage 2 of the Procedures.

Students will be kept updated on progress.

Stage 1: frontline resolution

The University will try to resolve the complaint quickly, within **five working days** if possible.

If students remain dissatisfied with the outcome decision of the University, students can ask for the complaint to be considered at Stage 2.

Stage 2: investigation

The University will consider a complaint at this stage if:

- a student remains dissatisfied with the response provided at the conclusion of Stage 1, or
- the matter raised is complex and requires detailed investigation at this stage from the outset.

The University will acknowledge the complaint within **three working days** and provide a decision as soon as possible, within **20 working days** *unless* there is clearly a good reason for needing more time.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)

If, after receiving the University's final decision on the complaint, a student remains dissatisfied with the decision or the way in which the complaint has been handled, a student can ask the SPSO to consider it. The University will provide information on how to refer to the SPSO when providing confirmation of the final outcome of the University's consideration of the complaint.