



Complaints Handling Procedure: A Guide for Complainants

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Document Change History

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4	All	Major review based on revised SPSO Model Handling Procedure	Apr 21
3	How do I Complain	Page 4 – Updated to include online form	Aug 17
2			
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Introduction

Fife College is committed to providing an excellent education and high-quality services to our students from enrolment to graduation.

We value complaints and use information from them to help us improve our services. If something goes wrong or you are dissatisfied with our services, please tell us.

This leaflet describes our complaints procedure and how to make a complaint. It also tells you about how we will handle your complaint and what you can expect from us.

What is a complaint?

We regard a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf.

What can I complain about?

You can complain about things like:

- the admissions process;
- the disciplinary process;
- a request for a service or for information which has not been actioned or answered;
- wrong information about academic programmes or college services;
- the quality and availability of facilities and learning resources;
- accessibility of our buildings or services;
- failure or refusal to provide a service;
- inadequate quality or standard of service, or an unreasonable delay in providing a service;
- dissatisfaction with one of our policies / procedures or its impact on the individual;
- failure to properly apply law, procedure or guidance when delivering services;
- failure to follow the appropriate administrative process;
- conduct, treatment by or attitude of a member of staff or contractor (except where there are arrangements in place for the contractor to handle the complaint themselves); or
- disagreement with a decision (except where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision, or an established appeals process followed throughout the sector).

Your complaint may involve more than one Fife College service or be about someone working on our behalf.

What can't I complain about?

There are some things we can't deal with through our complaints handling procedure. These include:

- a request for information or an explanation of policy or practice;
- a disagreement with academic judgment;
- a concern about student conduct;
- a routine first-time request for a service;
- a request for compensation only;
- issues that are in court or have already been heard by a court or a tribunal (if you decide to take legal action, you should let us know as the complaint cannot then be considered under this process);
- disagreement with a decision where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision (such as for freedom of information and subject access requests), or an established appeals process followed throughout the sector;
- a request for information under the Data Protection or Freedom of Information (Scotland) Acts;
- a grievance by a staff member or a grievance relating to employment or staff recruitment;
- a concern raised internally by a member of staff (which was not about a service they received, such as a whistleblowing concern);
- a concern about a child or an adult's safety;
- an attempt to reopen a previously concluded complaint or to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision;
- abuse or unsubstantiated allegations about our organisation or staff where such actions would be covered by our Unacceptable Actions Guidance; or
- a concern about the actions or service of a different organisation, where we have no involvement in the issue (except where the other organisation is delivering services on our behalf).

If other procedures or rights of appeal can help you resolve your concerns, we will give information and advice to help you.

Who can complain?

Anyone who receives, requests or is directly affected by our services can make a complaint to us. This includes the representative of someone who is dissatisfied with our service (for example, a relative, friend, advocate or adviser). If you are making a complaint on someone else's behalf, you will normally need their written consent. Please also read the section on getting help to make your complaint below.

How do I complain?

You can complain in person, by phone, in writing, by email, completion of our complaints form or online via the College website (www.fife.ac.uk).

It is easier for us to address complaints if you make them quickly and directly to the service concerned. So please talk to a member of our staff within the department you are complaining about. Then they can try to resolve any problems on the spot.

When complaining, please tell us:

- your full name and contact details;
- as much as you can about the complaint;
- what has gone wrong; and
- what outcome you are seeking.

How long do I have to make a complaint?

Normally, you must make your complaint within six months of:

- the event you want to complain about; or
- finding out that you have a reason to complain.

In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

Contact details

Written complaints should be marked for the attention of the Quality Team and may be submitted:

- to any College reception
- or posted directly to the Quality Team, Fife College, Stenton Campus, Stenton Road, Glenrothes, Fife, KY6 2RA

Complaints by email should be addressed to complaints@fife.ac.uk

Complaints by telephone should be made to 0344 248 0115.

Please note, due to social distancing rules, the Quality Team are working from home at present, so it would be advisable to submit complaints via the online form or by email where at all possible.

What happens when I have complained?

We will always tell you who is dealing with your complaint. Our complaints procedure has two stages.

Stage 1: Frontline Response

We aim to respond to complaints quickly (where possible, when you first tell us about the issue). This could mean an on-the-spot apology and explanation if something has clearly gone wrong, or immediate action to resolve the problem.

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We will give you our decision at Stage 1 in five working days or less, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

If you are not satisfied with the response we give at this stage, we will tell you what you can do next. If you choose to, you can take your complaint to Stage 2.

You must normally ask us to consider your complaint at Stage 2 either:

- within six months of the event you want to complain about or finding out that you have a reason to complain; or
- within two months of receiving your Stage 1 response (if this is later).

In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a Stage 2 complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

If you do not wish your complaint to be handled at Stage 1, you can ask us to handle it immediately at Stage 2 instead.

Stage 2: Investigation

Stage 2 deals with two types of complaint:

- Where the customer remains dissatisfied after Stage 1.
- Those which are complex and will clearly require a detailed investigation, and so are handled directly at this stage.

When using Stage 2:

- we will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three working days;
- we will confirm our understanding of the complaint we will investigate and what outcome you are looking for;
- we will try to resolve your complaint where we can (in some cases we may suggest using an alternative complaint resolution approach, such as mediation); and
- where we cannot resolve your complaint, we will give you a full response as soon as possible, normally within 20 working days.

If our investigation will take longer than 20 working days, we will tell you. We will tell you our revised time limits and keep you updated on progress.

What if I'm still dissatisfied?

After we have given you our final decision, if you are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with your complaint, you can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) or the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) or other awarding body to look at it. For qualifications that are regulated, if you remain dissatisfied with the way the awarding body has handled your complaint then you may complain to the qualifications regulator, SQA Accreditation. Fife College can provide further advice on which organisation you should approach.

In all cases, the complaint must first have been considered by the College.

The SPSO are not able to look at academic judgement and do not have the power to revise course results. This can only be achieved through an academic appeals process. The SPSO consider complaints about the quality of service and maladministration, which may include issues surrounding course delivery.

The SPSO are an independent organisation that investigates complaints. They are not an advocacy or support service (but there are other organisations who can help you with advocacy or support). You can ask the SPSO to look at your complaint if:

- you have gone all the way through Fife College's complaints handling procedure and are dissatisfied with the outcome or are unhappy with the way we have handled your complaint
- it is less than 12 months after you became aware of the matter you want to complain about; and
- the matter has not been (and is not being) considered in court.

The SPSO will ask you to complete a complaint form and provide a copy of our final response to your complaint. You can do this online at:

www.spsso.org.uk/complain/form

The SPSO's contact details are:

SPSO

Bridgeside House
99 McDonald Road
Edinburgh
EH7 4NS

(if you would like to visit in person, you must make an appointment first)

FREEPOST SPSO (you do not need a stamp)

Freephone: 0800 377 7330

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

Website: www.spsso.org.uk

Getting help to make your complaint

We understand that you may be unable or reluctant to make a complaint yourself. You may wish to get independent support or advocacy to help you progress your complaint. We accept complaints from the representative of a person who is dissatisfied with our service. We can take complaints from a friend, relative, or an advocate, if you have given them your consent to complain for you.

If you have trouble putting your complaint in writing please contact a member of our Guidance Team who will be happy to assist you.

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We are committed to making our service easy to use for all members of the community. In line with our statutory equalities duties, we will always ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to help you access and use our services.

We can also give you this leaflet in other languages and formats (such as large print, audio and Braille), upon request.

Quick guide to our complaints procedure

Complaints procedure

You can make a complaint in person, by phone, in writing, by email, completion of our complaints form or online via the College Website.

We have a **two-stage complaints procedure**. We will always try to deal with your complaint quickly. But if it is clear that the matter will need a detailed investigation, we will tell you and keep you updated on our progress.

Stage 1: Frontline Response

We will always try to resolve your complaint quickly, within **five working days** if we can.

If you are dissatisfied with our response, you can ask us to consider your complaint at Stage 2.

Stage 2: Investigation

We will look at your complaint at this stage if you are dissatisfied with our response at Stage 1. We will also look at some complaints immediately at this stage, if it is clear they are complex or need detailed investigation.

We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within **three working days**. We will give you our decision as soon as possible. This will be after no more than **20 working days** *unless* there is clearly a good reason for needing more time.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

If, after receiving our final decision on your complaint, you remain dissatisfied with our decision of the way we have handled your complaint, you can ask the SPSO to consider it. We will tell you how to do this when we send you our final decision.