



**THE SCOTTISH HIGHER EDUCATION
MODEL COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE (CHP)**

EDINBURGH NAPIER UNIVERSITY ADAPTATION

PART 2 of 4: WHEN TO USE THE CHP

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1. What is a complaint?

CP2.1 Edinburgh Napier University's definition of a complaint is: 'an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more of our students, other service users or members of the public about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of us.'

CP2.2 This procedure is generally for use of our students, other service users and members of the general public. Employees should contact their line manager or Human Resources should they wish to complain about something relating to their employment though where an employee also receives a service from us that they could receive as a member of the public, e.g. if they are a matriculated student, an applicant to a programme of study or a member of [EN]gage gym, they may complain about that service using this procedure.

CP2.3 A complaint may relate to the following, but is not restricted to this list:

- failure or refusal to provide a service
- inadequate quality or standard of service, or an unreasonable delay in providing a service
- the quality of facilities or learning resources
- dissatisfaction with one of our policies or its impact on the individual (although it is recognised that policy is set at the discretion of the institution)
- 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 staff¹ or contractor (**except** where there are arrangements in place for the contractor to handle the complaint themselves: see [Complaints about contracted services](#))
- disagreement with a decision, (**except** where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision, or an established appeals process followed throughout the sector)

CP2.4 A complaint is not:

- a request for information or an explanation of policy or practice
- a response to an invitation to provide feedback through a formal mechanism such as a questionnaire or committee membership
- a concern about student conduct (see [Complaints and student conduct procedures](#))
- a routine first-time request for a service (see [Complaints and service requests](#))
- a request for compensation only (see [Complaints and compensation claims](#))
- an insurance claim
- issues that are in court or have already been heard by a court or a tribunal (see [Complaints and legal action](#))

¹ Note: we may elect to channel such complaints via the appropriate staff procedure.

- 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 (such as an appeal about an academic decision on assessment or admission – see [Complaints and appeals](#))
- a request for information under the Data Protection or Freedom of Information (Scotland) Acts, or the Environmental Information Regulations
- 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)
- concerns about services out with the institution’s delegated responsibilities (e.g. conference and accommodation services to commercial clients)
- 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 institution or staff where such actions would be covered by our [Unacceptable Actions Policy](#)
- 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: see [Complaints about contracted services](#))

CP2.5 We will not treat the issues listed in CP2.4 as complaints and will instead direct people to use the appropriate procedures. Some situations can involve a combination of issues, where some are complaints and others are not, and each situation will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

CP2.6 If a matter is not a complaint, or not suitable to be handled under the CHP, we will explain this to the complainant, and tell them what (if any) action we will take, and why. See [What if the CHP does not apply](#).

2. Who can make a complaint?

CP2.7 Anyone who receives, requests, or is affected by our services can make a Complaint.

CP2.8 This includes, although is not limited to:

- a student’s experience during their time at the institution (all referred to as ‘students’ through the remainder of this document)
- members of the public, where they have a complaint about matters which are (or which were at the time the issue arose) the responsibility of the institution
- members of the public who are applying for admission to the institution and whose complaint does not relate to academic judgement.²

² Some applicant complaints may be referred to our Admissions Policy for Feedback, Appeals and Complaints which can be found at the bottom of this page on our external website - <https://www.napier.ac.uk/study-with-us/undergraduate/how-to-apply/application-advice-and-support#5>

CP2.9 The basic processes for investigating complaints are the same for students, applicants to the institution³, other service users and members of the public.

CP2.10 We also accept complaints from the representative of a person who is dissatisfied with our service. See [Complaints by \(or about\) a third party](#).

3. Supporting the complainant

CP2.11 Everyone has the right to equal access to our complaints procedure. It is important to recognise the barriers that some people may face complaining. These may be physical, sensory, communication or language barriers, but can also include their anxieties and concerns. Complainants may need support to overcome these barriers. Furthermore, we will assure any students complaining that there will be no negative repercussions for them in doing so, in terms of an impact on their studies or engagement, via anyone against whom they have complained about or anyone associated with them. We will take action to investigate any reports of misuse of power as a separate complaint if we are advised anyone has suggested or threatened they can negatively impact a student's experience should they submit a complaint. We have robust procedures in place to ensure our assessment marking is free from bias.

CP2.12 For our students, we have a number of [support services](#) they may wish to access to assist them through their use of this procedure. Please see the information found at the link below, visit one of our campus iPoints or email wellbeingteam@napier.ac.uk with any general enquiries.

CP2.13 For complainants who are not one of our students, we ask that they let us know of anything we can do for them by way of us making any reasonable adjustments so that they can fully engage with the procedure. To do this initially, all requests should be emailed to complaints@napier.ac.uk or telephone 0131 455 2396.

CP2.14 We have legal duties to make our complaints service accessible under equalities and mental health legislation.

For example:

- the Equality Act (Scotland) 2010 – this gives people with a protected characteristic the right to reasonable adjustments to access our services (such as large print or BSL translations of information)
- the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 – this gives anyone with a 'mental disorder' (including mental health issues, learning difficulties, dementia and autism) a right to access independent advocacy. This must be delivered by independent organisations that only provide advocacy. They help people to know and understand their rights, make informed decisions and have a voice.

³ Appeals or complaints regarding a decision not to admit an applicant will be dealt with through the admissions procedures found at this link - <https://www.napier.ac.uk/study-with-us/undergraduate/how-to-apply/application-advice-and-support#5>.

CP2.15 Examples of how we will meet our legal duties are:

- proactively checking whether members of the public who contact us require additional support to access our services
- providing interpretation and/or translation services for British Sign Language users upon request;
- helping complainants access independent advocacy (the [Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance website](#) has information about local advocacy organisations throughout Scotland).

CP2.16 In addition to our legal duties, we will seek to ensure that we support vulnerable groups in accessing our complaints procedure. Actions that we may take include:

- helping vulnerable people identify when they might wish to make a complaint (for example, by training frontline staff who provide services to vulnerable groups)
- helping complainants access independent support or advocacy to help them understand their rights and communicate their complaints (for example, through the [Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance](#) or [Citizen's Advice Scotland](#))
- providing a neutral point of contact for complaints (where the relationship between complainants and frontline staff is significant and ongoing)

CP2.17 These lists are not exhaustive, and we must always take into account our commitment and responsibilities to equality and accessibility.

4. How complaints may be made

CP2.18 Complaints may be made verbally or in writing, including face-to-face, by phone, letter or email.

CP2.19 Where a complaint is made **verbally**, we will make a record of the key points of complaint raised.

Where it is clear that a complex complaint will be immediately considered at stage 2 (investigation) or where a complaint has not been resolved at stage 1 (frontline), it may be helpful for the complainant to complete a complaint form CP1 (available [here](#) or via email at complaints@napier.ac.uk) with the complainant's input to ensure full details of the complaint are documented. However, there is no requirement for the person to complete a complaint form though the completion of the form may be mutually beneficial to both the complainant and the University.

The expectation of the University is that completion of the complaint form will be undertaken by the complainant to allow them to articulate their complaint though we will offer assistance with the completion of the form and in some cases may complete the form on behalf of the complainant with full approval of the complainant sought before the completed form stands as a final record of the complaint.

5. Complaints made via digital platforms and social media

CP2.20 Complaint issues may also be raised on digital platforms (including social media).

CP2.21 Where a complaint issue is raised via a digital channel managed and controlled by the University (for example an official Twitter address or Facebook page):

- we will usually respond by explaining that we do not normally take complaints on social media and telling the person how they can complain
- in exceptional circumstances, we may respond to very simple complaints on social media. This will normally only be appropriate where an issue is likely to affect a large number of people, and we can provide a very simple response

CP2.22 We may also become aware that an issue has been raised via a digital channel not controlled or managed by us (for example a YouTube video or post on a private Facebook group). In such cases we **may** respond, where we consider it appropriate, by telling the person how they can complain.

CP2.23 We must always be mindful of our data protection obligations when responding to issues online or in a public forum. See the section entitled **Maintaining confidentiality and data protection** in document [Part 1](#).

6. Time limit for making complaints

CP2.24 The complainant must usually raise their complaint within six months of when they first knew of the problem. Examples of why we may extend the timeframe include but are not limited to:

- evidence that suggests a person was not able to complain due to illness or recent bereavement
- complaints that relate to reports of sexual misconduct.

CP2.25 Where a complainant has received a stage 1 response, and wishes to escalate to stage 2, unless there are special circumstances they must request this either:

- within six months of when they first knew of the problem; or
- within two months of receiving their stage 1 response (if this is later)

CP2.26 We will apply these time limits with discretion, taking into account the seriousness of the issue, the availability of relevant records and staff involved, how long ago the events occurred, and the likelihood that an investigation will lead to a practical benefit for the complainant or useful learning for the institution.

CP2.27 We will also take account of the time limit within which a member of the public can ask the SPSO to consider complaints (normally one year). The SPSO

have discretion to waive this time limit in special circumstances (and may consider doing so in cases where we have waived our own time limit).

7. Complaints by (or about) a third party

CP2.28 Sometimes a complainant may be unable or reluctant to make a complaint on their own. We will accept complaints from third parties, which may include relatives, friends, members of staff, advocates and advisers. Where a complaint is made on behalf of a complainant, we must ensure that the complainant has authorised the person to act on their behalf. It is good practice to ensure the complainant understands their personal information will be shared as part of the complaints handling process (particularly where this includes sensitive personal information). This can include complaints brought by parents on behalf of their child, if the child is considered to have capacity to make decisions for themselves.

CP2.29 If an individual wishes to nominate someone to make and handle a complaint on their behalf, they should send us a signed document naming who they have authorised to handle the complaint and acknowledge that in designating them to do this we will disclose details of any matter pertaining to the complaint to them. For our students, we will accept an email from their Edinburgh Napier University email address outlining this.

CP2.30 In certain circumstances, a person may raise a complaint involving another person's personal data, without receiving consent. The complaint will still be investigated where possible, but the investigation and response may be limited by considerations of confidentiality. The person who submitted the complaint will be made aware of these limitations and the effect this will have on the scope of the response.

8. Serious, high risk or high profile complaints

CP2.31 We will take particular care to identify complaints that might be considered serious, high-risk or high-profile, as these may require particular action or raise critical issues that need senior management's direct input. Serious, high-risk or high-profile complaints will normally be handled immediately at stage 2. Please see the section entitled **Stage 2: Investigation** in document [Part 3](#).

CP2.32 We define potential high-risk or high profile complaints as those that may:

- involve a death or terminal illness
- involve serious service failure, for example major delays in service provision or repeated failures to provide a service
- generate significant and on-going press interest
- pose a serious operational risk to the institution; or
- present issues of a highly sensitive nature

9. Anonymous complaints

CP2.33 We value all complaints, including anonymous complaints, and will take action to consider them further wherever this is appropriate. Generally, we will

consider anonymous complaints if there is enough information in the complaint to enable us to make further enquiries. Any decision not to pursue an anonymous complaint will be taken by the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Manager and/or an appropriate member of senior staff.

CP2.34 If we pursue an anonymous complaint further, we will record it as an anonymous complaint together with any learning from the complaint and action taken.

CP2.35 If an anonymous complainant makes serious allegations, these should be dealt with in a timely manner under relevant procedures. This may not be the complaints procedure and could instead be relevant child protection, adult protection or disciplinary procedures.

10. What if the person does not want to complain?

CP2.36 If someone has expressed dissatisfaction in line with our definition of a complaint but does not want to complain, we will explain that complaints offer us the opportunity to improve services where things have gone wrong. We will encourage them to submit their complaint and allow us to handle it through the CHP. This will ensure they are updated on the action taken and get a response to their complaint.

CP2.37 If the person insists they do not wish to complain, we are not required to progress the complaint under this procedure. However, we will consider recording the complaint as an anonymous complaint (including minimal information about the complaint, without any identifying information) to enable us to track trends and themes in complaints. Where the complaint is serious, or there is evidence of a problem with our services, we should also look into the matter to remedy this (and record any outcome).

11. Complaints involving more than one area or organisation

CP2.38 If a complaint relates to the actions of two or more Schools or Professional Services of the University or other organisations we will tell the complainant who will take the lead in dealing with the complaint, and explain that they will get only one response covering all issues raised. The nature of the complaint may also require parallel procedures to be initiated (such as academic appeal, disciplinary procedures or, if an external organisation is involved, their own procedures). See [Complaints and appeals](#).

CP2.39 If we receive a complaint about the service of another organisation or public service provider, but we have no involvement in the issue, the complainant will be advised to contact the appropriate organisation directly.

CP2.40 If a complaint relates to our service and the service of another organisation or public service provider, and we have a direct interest in the issue, we will handle the elements of the complaint concerning us through the CHP. If we need to contact an outside body about the complaint, we will do so in line with data protection legislation. See the section **Maintaining confidentiality and data protection** in document [Part 1](#).

- CP2.41** Such complaints as outlined in CP2.40 above may include but are not limited to:
- a complaint made in relation to provision of third-party services
 - a complaint made about a service that is contracted out
 - a complaint made to the institution about a student finance matter where the dissatisfaction relates to the service we have provided and the service the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) has provided.

12. Complaints about contracted services

CP2.42 Where we use a contractor to deliver a service on our behalf we recognise that we remain responsible and accountable for ensuring that the services provided meet our standard (including in relation to complaints handling). We will do so by either:

- ensuring the contractor complies with this procedure; or
- ensuring the contractor has their own procedure in place, which fully meets the standards in this procedure. At the end of the investigation stage of any such complaints the contractor must ensure that the complainant is signposted to the SPSO.

CP2.43 We will confirm that service users are clearly informed of the process and understand how to complain. We will also ensure that there is appropriate provision for information sharing and governance oversight where required.

CP2.44 We have discretion to investigate complaints about organisations contracted to deliver services on our behalf even where the procedure has normally been delegated.

13. Complaints about senior staff

CP2.45 Complaints about senior staff can be difficult to handle, as there may be a conflict of interest for the staff investigating the complaint. When serious complaints are raised against senior staff, it is particularly important that the investigation is conducted by an individual who is independent of the situation. We have strong governance arrangements in place that set out clear procedures for handling such complaints.

CP2.46 Should we receive a complaint against a member of our leadership teams, the University Secretary or their nominee will liaise with the Principal or their nominee regarding how the complaint will be handled. If the University Secretary is the subject of a complaint then the complaint will be referred directly to the Principal or their nominee. Should the Principal be the subject of a complaint, consideration of how the complaint is handled will be undertaken by the Chair of University Court or their nominee.

CP2.47 Where complaints against senior staff are concerned, we reserve the right to appoint a complaint investigator, who is external to the University, where we deem this to be appropriate.

CP2.48 In all cases of complaints made against senior staff, once it has been determined how the complaint will be investigated, the complainant will be fully informed with regard to what the process will entail noting that the complaint may be investigated in line with our Human Resources policies and procedures.

14. Complaints and other processes

CP2.49 Complaints can sometimes be confused (or overlap) with other processes, such as appeals or disciplinary processes. Specific examples and guidance on how we will handle these are below.

a. Complaints and appeals

CP2.50 In some cases, an issue may be raised as a complaint which should be considered under alternative arrangements (for example, an academic appeal or fitness to practise matter), or vice versa. Complaints and appeals are handled under separate processes. It is not appropriate for the same issue to be considered under both procedures.

CP2.51 Where the complaint and appeal issues can be clearly distinguished, we will identify the points to be investigated as a complaint and progress those in line with this procedure. This will include confirming the points of complaint and outcomes sought. We will also identify and set out the issues of appeal.

CP2.52 In determining which process applies, we may need to clarify our approach with the complainant (for example, where the complainant is focussed solely on the appeal outcome they may not wish to also pursue a complaint). However, we will not normally ask the complainant to resubmit issues they have already raised (for example, to reframe part of their appeal as a complaint).

CP2.53 We may also decide to complete consideration under one procedure before considering residual issues under another procedure (for example, we may delay consideration of any complaint until the academic appeal has been concluded, or vice versa). This would normally only take place when it is difficult to distinguish which issues should be dealt with under which procedure.

CP2.54 In all cases, we will explain to the student which issues have been considered under which process, and signpost them to the appropriate independent review.

b. Complaints and student conduct procedures

CP2.55 A concern about the conduct of another student is likely to be handled via the [Student Conduct Regulations](#). However, the person making the complaint may wish to complain about how we handled the situation. Where the complaint is about our service, we will consider it under the CHP.

c. Complaints and service requests

CP2.56 If someone asks us to do something (for example, provide a service or deal with a problem), and this is the first time they have contacted us, this would normally be a routine service request and not a complaint.

CP2.57 Service requests can lead to complaints, if the request is not handled promptly or the person is then dissatisfied with how we provide the service.

d. Complaints and the staff disciplinary procedure

CP2.58 If the issues raised in a complaint ultimately need to be handled via our staff disciplinary procedure, we will still respond to the complainant.

CP2.59 In our response we will be careful not to share confidential information such as anything about the disciplinary procedures, or outcomes for individual staff members. Our response will focus on whether we failed to meet the standards we set ourselves and, where applicable, focus on what we have done to improve things in general terms.

CP2.60 Staff investigating such complaints will take extra care to ensure that:

- we comply with all requirements of the CHP in relation to the complaint (as well as meeting the requirements of the other processes)
- all complaint issues are addressed (sometimes issues can get missed if they are not also relevant to the overlapping process); and
- we keep records of the investigation that can be made available to the SPSO if required. This can be problematic when the other process is confidential, because SPSO will normally require documentation of any correspondence and interviews to show how conclusions were reached. We will need to bear this in mind when planning any elements of the investigation that might overlap (for example, if staff are interviewed for the purposes of both the complaint and a disciplinary procedure, they should not be assured that any evidence given will be confidential, as it may be made available to the SPSO).

CP2.61 The SPSO's report [Making complaints work for everyone](#) has more information on supporting staff who are the subject of complaints.

e. Contact from MPs, MSPs or Councillors

CP2.62 Should we receive complaints on behalf of someone from MPs, MSPs or Councillors we will ask that the person they are making the complaint on behalf of provides confirmation that they consent for them to do so. Alternatively, we may ask that the Data Sharing form found at the bottom of section 8.6 [here](#) is completed.

f. Complaints and compensation claims

CP2.63 Where someone is seeking financial compensation only, this is not a complaint. However, in some cases the person may want to complain about

the matter leading to their financial claim, and they may seek additional outcomes, such as an apology or an explanation. Where appropriate, we may consider that matter as a complaint, but deal with the financial claim separately. Where appropriate we may extend the timeframes for responding to the complaint, to consider the financial claim first.

g. Complaints and legal action

CP2.64 Where a complainant says that legal action is being actively pursued, this is not a complaint.

CP2.65 Where a complainant indicates that they are thinking about legal action, but have not yet commenced this, they should note that if they take such action, they should inform the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Manager and that the complaints process, in relation to the matters that will be considered through the legal process, will be closed. Any outstanding complaints not forming part of the legal process will still be addressed through the CHP.

CP2.66 If an issue has been, or is being, considered by a court, we will not consider the same issue under the CHP.

15. What we will do if the CHP does not apply

CP2.67 If the issue does not meet the definition of a complaint or if it is not appropriate to handle it under this procedure (for example, due to time limits), we will explain to the complainant why we have made this decision. We will also tell them what action (if any) we will take (for example, if another procedure applies), and advise them of their right to contact the SPSO if they disagree with our decision not to respond to the issue as a complaint.

CP2.68 Where a complainant continues to contact us about the same issue, we will explain that we have already given them our final response on matter and signpost them to the SPSO. We may also consider whether need to take action under our [Unacceptable Actions Policy](#).