

Complaint Handling - Guidelines for staff

As the majority of complaints are likely to be dealt with locally, staff members require training and guidance in developing good complaint handling skills. The following guidelines are provided to help staff to deal with and respond to complaints when being made in person or via the telephone.

Stage 1: Establish whether the complaint relates to your area of work and whether it is within the authority of your unit to resolve the matter. If not provide the complainant with the contact details of the relevant area. Where possible avoid transferring the complainant from person to person.

To handle complaints effectively staff should try to:

- Treat complainants courteously and professionally at all times.
- Where the complaint is being made in person, provide your own name, greet the person in a positive manner and ask how you can help.
- Listen carefully to what the person has to say and give them enough time to express their complaint in full. Sometimes complainants will feel the need to express their anger about a situation. Listening and acknowledging that you understand the issue may help to alleviate a stressful situation.
- Summarise the complaint back to the person to demonstrate that you have understood, and seek clarifications of points that aren't clear to you. If it is unclear from the initial conversation what remedy is being sought by the complainant, ask what solutions might help.
- If you have sufficient knowledge about the issue, provide relevant information that will assist the complainant to better understand the decision or the action that they are aggrieved about. If you do not have sufficient information, assure the complainant that someone will follow up with them about their complaint as soon as possible, but within 15 working days.
- Manage the expectations of the complainant about what outcomes might possibly be achieved.
- Even if you feel the complaint is unjustified the person's sense of grievance is real and therefore complaints should never be dismissed out of hand. Instead you should endeavour to provide information and give reasons if the complaint has arisen from misunderstanding.
- Where possible take responsibility to resolve the problem on the spot.
- Resolution of the situation might be achieved by a relatively simple action, such as an apology, explanation or the provision of information. If on the spot solutions are not possible outline possible options for redress and seek agreement of complainant of these.
- If you are not in a position or do not have the authority to agree a remedy or action being sought escalate the complaint to an appropriate person for decision (e.g. the head of department).

- If the complainant is not satisfied with your attempts to resolve the matter advise that the complaint can be reviewed by the Head of Department or Head of School. Provide complainants with the following information:
 - the name and email address of the head of department,
 - how to submit their complaint (i.e. by email on the official University form – Student Complaint Form: Head of Department Review) and
 - the timeframe within which the complaint must be raised.
- A record of the complaint should be made which should include the following information:
 - each complainant’s name, student ID number, and NCAD email address
 - a summary of the complaint (what happened, when, where, who was involved and what the impact on the complainant was), and
 - the specific action to address the issue sought by the student.

Local Complaint Handling Checklist

<input type="checkbox"/>	Listen effectively (where the complaint is made by phone or in person)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Demonstrate empathy
<input type="checkbox"/>	Understand the complainant’s needs and the remedy sought
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ask the right questions
<input type="checkbox"/>	Offer an apology, where appropriate