



*Heriot-Watt Student Union*

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# ***OUR PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS***

*Approved by Trustee Board: May 2024  
Review Period: 3 Years*



[hwunion.com](http://hwunion.com)

These procedures are for the use of anyone who wishes to raise a complaint in respect of Heriot-Watt Student Union (HWUnion) services or facilities. HWUnion aims to ensure that students get the most out of their time at Heriot-Watt University (HWU) and everything we do is informed by our purpose: Students First, Always, and our core values: Brave, Empowering, Fun, Student Focused and Welcoming.

If you feel we have not offered these values in our dealings with you, we understand that you may wish to complain about this.

Although we will always seek to resolve a complaint as quickly as possible on an informal basis, we recognise that this will not always be possible. The procedures below outline how we handle a complaint by any person or organisation concerning their interaction with HWUnion.

## 1. WHO CAN COMPLAIN?

Anyone can complain who has come into contact with any of the HWUnion services, publications, or people acting on HWUnion's behalf.

## 2. WHAT CAN I COMPLAIN ABOUT USING THIS PROCEDURE?

We will accept complaints raised about:

- Failure to provide a service or activity
- The quality of our services and facilities
- Unfair treatment or inappropriate behaviour by an HWUnion staff member, volunteer or another person acting on behalf of HWUnion

## 3. IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN'T COMPLAIN ABOUT USING THIS PROCEDURE?

There are some things which we are unable to deal with through our formal complaints handling procedure. In any case, where we are unable to deal with your complaint, we will explain this to you and, where possible, direct you to an appropriate alternative.

Issues which we are unable to deal with through this complaints procedure include:

- A general enquiry or feedback, including routine, first time requests for a service – these can be addressed to [hello@hwunion.com](mailto:hello@hwunion.com)
- Complaints about Heriot-Watt University. The University has a Complaints Handling Procedure which can address these issues ([www.hw.ac.uk/uk/about/policies/complaints.htm](http://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/about/policies/complaints.htm)). You can discuss this confidentially with an Advisor at the Advice Hub prior to approaching the University.
- Complaints about the behaviour or conduct of another student (unless while they were acting in an official HWUnion role) should be referred to HWU Student Conduct procedures
- A complaint regarding the conduct of the Student Elections. These should be raised with the Deputy Returning Officer following the instructions at [www.hwunion.com/elections](http://www.hwunion.com/elections)
- Employment issues – these should be addressed via the staff Grievance Procedure ([www.hwunion.com/intranet/hr-policies](http://www.hwunion.com/intranet/hr-policies))
- A difference in political opinion
- A disagreement about policy content – this should be raised through the democratic processes outlined in the By Laws ([www.hwunion.com/about-us/policies-and-references](http://www.hwunion.com/about-us/policies-and-references))
- Decisions made to refuse admission to our venues under the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005. These decisions are final and cannot be appealed.
- Any issue which has already been dealt with through this complaints procedure and on which a final decision has been made.
- A complaint raised anonymously, as we would be unable to provide you with a response
- We do not investigate minor, misconceived, hypothetical, repetitious or vexatious complaints which are not supported by evidence of a breach of standards or complaints that are abusive or offensive

Complaints made against Societies, or a member of a society whilst engaging in a society activity, will be handled by the Society in question using these Complaints procedures. We will offer guidance and support to Societies if needed. Appeals will be handled by HWUnion. We will not intervene where individuals, not acting in an official capacity, have disagreements, but will offer guidance and support on coping in these situations wherever we can.

## 4. HOW CAN I MAKE A COMPLAINT?

We aim to resolve all complaints as soon as possible after they are raised with us. If you feel able, we would encourage you to raise your complaint at the frontline with the nearest HWUnion staff member, their manager or a relevant HWUnion representative. If you are unsure who to speak to, you can reach us via email ([complaints@hwunion.com](mailto:complaints@hwunion.com)), phone (0131 451 5333), letter (Heriot-Watt University Student Union, Riccarton, Edinburgh, EH14 4AS) or in-person. We cannot accept complaints via other means, such as social media.

We will only usually consider complaints raised within three months following the incident or issue occurring.

## 5. WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

If you have raised your complaint in-person, we will endeavour to address the issue immediately. In all other cases, we will aim to respond to you within twenty working days.

## 6. WHAT IF I AM NOT SATISFIED WITH THE OUTCOME OF THIS STAGE?

If you are not satisfied with the way your complaint has been dealt with at the frontline, you may wish to complete the HWUnion Complaint Form.

On the Complaint Form, you are asked to provide the following information:

- Your contact details
- As much information as possible related to the issue you are complaining about, including details of any action taken to raise your complaint
- An indication of how you would like us to address the issue
- Any documents or evidence that you would like to include along with your form

Before making your complaint, please read Sections 3 & 4, which provides more information about what issues our complaints procedure can deal with, and in what situations you may need to address your complaint elsewhere.

You can submit a complete Complaint Form via email to [complaints@hwunion.com](mailto:complaints@hwunion.com), or by post or hand delivery to any HWUnion outlet.

## 7. HOW WILL MY COMPLAINT FORM BE HANDLED?

We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within five working days.

Complaints about members of HWUnion staff will be investigated by the relevant Head of Department, or their Line Manager.

Complaints about any of HWUnion's activities or operations will be investigated by the relevant Head of Department.

All complaints raised at this stage, and the responses given to them, will be reported to HWUnion Senior Management Team, the Student President and the HWUnion Board of Trustees.

In some cases, a complaint may lead to an investigation under the HWUnion HR Disciplinary procedures. Please note, these procedures are confidential, and it will not be possible to update you on their outcome.

As part of the investigation, we may ask to discuss your complaint with you and explain why you remain dissatisfied. We will provide you with a written response to your complaint within twenty working days. If we are unable to respond to your complaint within twenty working days, we will contact you to explain why this is, and let you know when you can expect to receive a response.

## 8. WHAT IF I AM NOT HAPPY WITH THE WAY MY COMPLAINT WAS INVESTIGATED?

If you are not happy with how your complaint was handled and investigated, you can submit an appeal to us to have your complaint reviewed.

We have three criteria for why an appeal can be made...

1. There is new evidence that could not reasonably have been provided prior to your complaint being investigated, and the evidence is such that the outcome of your complaint may have been different.
2. You believe there was a procedural error during the process that you feel would have led to a different outcome had the error not occurred.
3. You feel there was prejudice or bias in the handling of your complaint that would have led to a different outcome should this not have occurred

You need to submit an appeal, in the form of a letter, within five working days of receiving the written response to your complaint. We will acknowledge your request within five working days.

You can submit your appeal letter via email to [complaints@hwunion.com](mailto:complaints@hwunion.com), or by post, and it should include your contact details, the criteria you meet (see above) and why you feel it is appropriate, any supporting evidence you have, and an indication of what you would like to happen as a result of appealing.

Appeals meeting the above criteria will be handled by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). If the CEO has been involved in an earlier stage of your complaint, your appeal will be handled by the Student President or Chair of the Trustee Board or their nominee. Your appeal will always be handled by someone who has not been previously involved in your complaint.

All appeals, and the responses given to them, will be reported to HWUnion Senior Management Team, the Student President and the HWUnion Board of Trustees.

Your complaint will be reviewed, along with the response you received. If we feel it is necessary, we may invite you to discuss your appeal and the evidence you have submitted. We will provide you with a written response to your appeal within twenty working days. If we are unable to respond to your complaint within twenty working days, we will contact you to explain why this is, and let you know when you can expect to receive a response.

The outcome of the appeal stage completes the internal processes for consideration of a complaint by HWUnion.

## 9. OTHER USEFUL THINGS TO KNOW...

HWUnion would prefer to have an opportunity to resolve a complaint internally before referral to an external organisation. However, these procedures will normally be suspended if you refer your complaint to court, tribunal or another external organisation (including HWU) until the outcome of that external process is known.

You have the right to support during the processing of your complaint and you may bring a representative along to any meetings held as part of the process. As this is an internal HWUnion procedure, it does not have the same degree of formality as a court of law, therefore you can't normally bring anyone who is not a member of staff or a student at HWU. Similarly, to avoid potential conflict of interest, no member of HWUnion staff or student staff can act as a representative.

Please note, the Advice Hub at HWUnion cannot offer advice or support with complaints being raised against HWUnion or any member of HWUnion staff as this would be a clear conflict of interest. If you require support with raising a complaint, we recommend you seek advice from your local Citizens Advice Bureau.

We welcome any reasonable requests for adjustments to these procedures in line with your rights under the Equality Act 2010. We'll consider requests on an individual basis and notify you of any adjustments that have been agreed at the earliest opportunity.

We'll ensure we act in accordance with legislation to protect your privacy. Your complaint will be handled with an appropriate level of confidentiality and will only be shared to those who need it for the purposes of investigating or responding to you, or taking steps to address the issues you raise. We will only share externally should we feel there is a risk of harm to you (or someone else) or if there is a legal requirement to do so. We may link your complaint to information we hold about your membership with us, for example verifying your membership of a Society if making an appeal about how a Society has treated you. For more information about how we handle your privacy, please visit [www.hwunion.com/privacy](http://www.hwunion.com/privacy).

In the interests of fairness and justice, individuals who are the subject of your complaint have a right to know who has raised the complaint, the nature of the complaint and have a right to the full facts in order to be able to defend themselves. A complaint made by a named individual will only be handled anonymously in

exceptional circumstances where there is a clear rationale for doing so e.g. where you need to be protected.