## Complaints Procedures (Part 1) – Informal[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Aim of the Service**

The Student Counselling and Advisory Service is committed to providing a quality service to the University and its members. We try to give the best service possible, but there may be times when you feel this has not happened. We are interested to know of any concerns you have about the work of the Service, and encourage you to make these known as early as possible.

**Concerns about a counsellor**

Most difficulties can be settled informally at an early stage by talking directly to your counsellor. Doing so provides the opportunity to discuss your concerns in detail. The counsellor concerned will understand that you are taking responsibility for yourself in the counselling relationship. This can be very helpful, as it allows for the possibility of clearing up any inadvertent misunderstandings and/or correcting possible mistakes.

If you feel unable to do this, or have done so but still feel dissatisfied; you can ask to speak to the Head of Counselling, Geraldine Connolly, by phone or in person.

The Head of Counselling will speak to the counsellor concerned and may also suggest a 3-way meeting if this is mutually agreed. If it is not appropriate to approach the Head of Counselling, e.g. if she is your counsellor, you can ask to speak to Dr Pat Morgan, Vice President of the Student Experience.

Your concern will be listened to and she will do what is possible to promote clear communication aimed at resolving the problem.

**Concerns about any other aspect of the Service**Where your complaint is to do with Service policy or delivery, as opposed to the work of an individual counsellor, you can raise your concern informally with any member of staff at any time, or you can ask to speak to the Head of Counselling by phone or in person. Alternatively, you can take the opportunity to comment anonymously by completing the annual user survey.

**Contact details**Ms. Geraldine ConnollyTel: +35391 492484

Mail: geraldine.connolly@nuigalway.ie

## Complaints Procedures (Part II) – Formal

**Aim of the Service**

The Student Counselling Service is committed to providing a quality service to the University and its members. The Student Counselling Service, together with other Student Support Services, is under the remit of the Vice President for Student Services. We try to give the best service possible, but there may be times when you feel this has not happened. As part of our adherence to professional practice, it is important that we have a clear, equitable and efficient procedure for attending and responding to complaints. The following information will help you think through what to do if you have a complaint.

**General Principles**

We will attempt to deal with the complaint in a transparent and equitable manner, based on the principles of ‘Natural Justice’.

* A full written account of the complaint must be submitted.
* Those being complained against will receive a copy of the complaint and will have the right to reply.
* The complainant has a right to be accompanied by friend or representative from the Student’s Union to any meetings regarding the complaint.
* An individual who is the subject of a complaint is entitled to be accompanied by a friend or Union representative to any meetings regarding the complaint.
* There are separate processes for investigating the complaint and deciding on the outcome of the investigation.
* If the complaint is about a counsellor, service policy or service delivery it will normally be dealt with by the Head of Service.
* If the complaint is about the Head of the Counselling Service, it will normally be dealt with by the Vice President for Student Services
* In the event that the Head of Counselling has a conflict of interest, the matter will be dealt with in the first instance by the Vice President for Student Services & Human Resources . In the event of prior involvement by the Vice President for Student Services & Human Resources, an independent investigator will be appointed by an alternative member of the University Management Team who will deal with the matter.

**Formal Procedure**

If informal resolution of an issue is not possible, or you decline to use informal means, the following is the appropriate formal procedure which will apply (contact details of all those referred to are listed at the end of this document).

A complaint could concern either:

* The professional conduct of a counsellor **or**
* Service policy or any other aspect of service delivery

In both cases the process to be followed is similar. The main difference is that if the complaint is about an individual counsellor then that person has a right to reply.

In order to investigate the complaint, it may be necessary to reveal the identity of the complainant to individuals involved in the investigation. Every effort will be made to observe confidentiality and to ensure that information concerning this complaint is restricted.

If the complaint is about the policy of the counselling service or any other aspect of service delivery, then it must be addressed to the Head of the Counselling Service in the first instance.

**Stage 1**

Submit your complaint in writing to the Head of Service. Receipt of your complaint will be acknowledged within 7 working days. The complaint must be specific and fully documented. You will need to provide details, including your name and address, dates, locations and relevant documentation as appropriate. You should also describe any previous attempts at resolution. Finally, you should state what reasonable steps you think could be taken to resolve the complaint.

If appropriate the counsellor who is the subject of the complaint will be supplied with a copy of the complaint and will be asked to submit his/her response to the complaint in writing within 10 days. Included in the response will be what reasonable steps have been or could be taken to resolve matters.

The Head of Counselling will give your concerns full and careful consideration, and provide you with a written response about the outcome within 14 working days. As part of this process, the Head of Counselling may consult with external senior counselling colleagues, in which case identifying details of the student concerned will not be disclosed. Confidentiality will be confined strictly to those dealing with complaint.

If the matter remains unresolved or the subject of your complaint happens to be the Head of Counselling, then the Vice President for the Student Experience will manage the complaint.

**Stage 2**

If you consider that the complaint has not been adequately addressed by the Head of Counselling, you can request a review by submitting your complaint in writing to the Vice President of Student Services & Human Resources. Receipt of your submission will be acknowledged within 7 days. The complaint must be specific and fully documented. You will need to provide details, including your name and address, dates, locations and relevant documentation as appropriate. You should also describe any previous attempts at resolution. Finally, you should state what reasonable steps you think could be taken to resolve the complaint.

The Head of Counselling will also be asked to submit his/her own response, including what reasonable steps have been or could be taken to resolve matters.

The Vice President of Student Services, in consultation with other relevant University authorities if appropriate, will address your concerns fully and provide you with a written response about the outcome of the review. Please note that confidentiality rests within the University, and not solely with those noted previously.

**Outcomes**

If the internal enquiry, at whatever level, finds that a counsellor has acted professionally and appropriately, the University will take no further action.

However, if the internal enquiry finds that a counsellor has acted in an unprofessional manner, or has breached the relevant ethical code, this would then be a matter for disciplinary proceedings (<http://www.nuigalway.ie/hr/documents/disciplinary.pdf>) as well as a matter for referral to the appropriate professional body, for example Standards and Ethics Committee of the IAUCC ([www.iaucc.ie](http://www.iaucc.ie/))

Both professional bodies will presume you have pursued all internal means of complaint in the first instance

1. This policy is based on the Complaints Procedure developed by Glasgow University Counselling Service. We gratefully acknowledge their assistance. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)