



## SGSSS Complaints Procedures

### 1. Purpose of this Complaints and Appeals Procedure

The Scottish Graduate School of Social Science (SGSSS) is committed to providing an excellent and fair educational experience for our students and high-quality services to all our stakeholders and other service users. We have a duty to maintain and enhance the quality of our provision and to provide an effective system for handling complaints.

This complaints guidance provides information to ensure that complainants can raise matters of concern without fear of disadvantage and in the knowledge that privacy and confidentiality will be respected. We value complaints and use information from them to support our stakeholders and help us improve our services.

This document provides guidance for applicants, current award-holders and other SGSSS stakeholders on how to raise a complaint if their issue relates to:

- How applications for funding have been handled by SGSSS
- Any service provision offered by SGSSS
- Actions or behaviour of any members of SGSSS staff
- Experiencing or witnessing harassment or bullying through any aspect of SGSSS interaction and/or provision.

There are some issues which cannot be dealt with through the SGSSS Complaints Procedure. These include:

- If a student wishes to receive feedback on an unsuccessful doctoral application, they should contact their [PGR Lead](#).
- If the complaint relates to the handling of an application which was not nominated to SGSSS through the Stage One review process, this should be directed to the relevant HEI-DTP member institution.
- If the complaint relates to issues around supervision, institutional resources and/or any consideration of interruptions to study, it should first be directed to the [HEI Admin Lead or Dean of graduate studies](#) at the home institution.
- If the complaint relates to an ESRC or UKRI policy: if this situation arises, please contact the SGSSS team via [team@sgsss.ac.uk](mailto:team@sgsss.ac.uk). We will help review the policy information and guidance available and, if needed, pass on the concerns to ESRC or UKRI. Further information about UKRI complaints procedures can be found here: [Make a complaint – UKRI](#). Please note that this is a link external to SGSSS and may be updated or removed without notice; if that is the case, we would advise using keywords in search engines to find UKRI/ESRC complaints procedures.

All complaints will be recorded, along with any action taken, as part of the [protocols](#) at our host institution, the University of Edinburgh.

## 1.1 Definitions

For the purposes of this document:

1. A **complaint** is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction around the standard of service, behaviours, action or lack of action by or on behalf of SGSSS.
2. The **complainant** is the person making the complaint.
3. An **appeal** is a formal process for reconsidering an official decision on funding applications or the wording, terms, or conditions of an offer. It will only be considered on the following grounds:
  - a. Procedural irregularity, where SGSSS has not adhered to its published guidance for awarding DTP and/or ESRC funding, and an applicant believes that the irregularity has caused substantial injustice.
  - b. Bias or perception of bias in the decision-making process. Applicants are required to provide evidence of specific examples with supporting documentation.
4. There are no rights of complaint or appeal over matters of academic judgement.

## 1.2 General Principles

1. Complaints can be made verbally, in writing, face to face, by phone, email or letter.
2. The complaint and any supporting documents will be seen by the person handling the complaint; it may also be seen by anyone named in the complaint as well as relevant staff in the department(s) being complained about.
3. All parties involved in the complaint are required to respect SGSSS procedures and act fairly and courteously towards each other.
4. Those involved in the complaint may act through representation, e.g. staff from one of the HEI member institutions.
5. Time limits will normally be met by all parties. If a complaint cannot be responded to in this timeframe, advice will be sought from the central Complaints Handling Team at the [University of Edinburgh](#), which is the host institution for SGSSS.
6. Appropriate steps will be taken to ensure that anonymous tips or complaints will be considered where there is sufficient evidence to do so.
7. If matters in dispute are being considered or have been decided by an external body, such as a court or tribunal, any complaint may be declined after consideration by the Complaints Handling Team at the [University of Edinburgh](#).
8. If SGSSS is conflicted, or otherwise unable to determine the matter, the complaint will be escalated to the University of Edinburgh's complaints procedures. Those determining the complaint or appeal should not have any conflict of interest in the matter.
9. Anyone who has followed this complaints Procedure and remains dissatisfied with the final response may seek Independent External Review of their complaint by contacting the [Scottish Public Services Ombudsman](#).

## 2. Applicants to the Doctoral Studentship Competitions

If you are requesting feedback on an unsuccessful application, please contact the [PGR Lead](#) at the institution where you applied.

For those who believe their application for a studentship award has been mishandled by SGSSS, they should use the complaints procedure outlined in **Point 3 – Raising a Complaint with SGSSS**. Please note that this only applies to those whose applications were submitted to SGSSS for review by one of the fourteen SGSSS HEI-DTP member institutions. If students were not nominated through the SGSSS stage one competition review process, any appeal or complaint relating to the handling of their application should be directed to the institution they applied to.

### 3. Raising a Complaint with SGSSS

Complaints about any aspect of SGSSS's operations should be raised with the SGSSS Head of Strategy and Operations in the first instance ([team@sgsss.ac.uk](mailto:team@sgsss.ac.uk)). We will acknowledge a complaint within three working days and normally respond within five working days.

Our aim is to respond to complaints quickly and offer a resolution, whether that is an apology, an explanation, or action that will resolve the matter. This is called a **frontline response**.

If the complaint is unresolved within SGSSS or if the complainant is dissatisfied with the response from SGSSS, they can escalate their complaint to the next stage of [University of Edinburgh's complaint's procedure](#).

#### 3.1 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

Any complaints about how we have handled a student's data, subject access requests or any aspect of GDPR should be directed to the [University of Edinburgh Data Protection Office \(dpo@ed.ac.uk\)](#) who will investigate the matter. If a student is not satisfied with the response or believes we are not processing their personal data in accordance with the law, they can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).