

## How to make a complaint to the Ombudsman

### What should you do first?

You should first put your complaint to the college or university concerned using its complaints procedure.

### What should you do next?

If you remain dissatisfied after completing the college or university's complaints procedure you can complain to the Ombudsman. This should normally be done in writing. You can submit a complaint form online via our website. Alternatively you can download the complaint form from our website, or contact the office to request a complaint form.

If you have difficulty in submitting your complaint to us in writing, please contact us on Freephone 0800 343424.

### How to contact the Ombudsman's Office:

You can contact us in the following ways:

**Telephone:** 028 9023 3821 or

**Freephone:** 0800 34 34 24

**Text Phone:** 028 9089 7789

**Email:** [nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk)

**web:** [nipso.org.uk](http://nipso.org.uk)

**Freepost:** Freepost NIPSO

or  
The Northern Ireland Public  
Services Ombudsman  
Progressive House  
33 Wellington Place  
BELFAST  
BT1 6HN

or  
By calling, between  
9.00am & 5.00pm,  
Monday to Friday,  
at the above address.

Please contact us if you would like this form in another language or format (such as large print or Braille)

Making a complaint  
about **further and  
higher education to  
the Ombudsman**



This leaflet tells you how to make a complaint to the Ombudsman about **further and higher education in Northern Ireland.**

*Our ASSIST team is here to help.  
If you need advice about making  
a complaint to the Ombudsman,  
please call us on Freephone  
0800 34 34 24*

## How can the Ombudsman help you?

The Ombudsman provides a free, independent and impartial service for handling complaints about public service providers in Northern Ireland. From 1 October 2016, the Ombudsman can also investigate complaints about further and higher education colleges and universities within Northern Ireland. This includes complaints from students enrolled in courses provided or validated by the universities. You can find a list of universities and colleges within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction on our website.

You have the right to complain to the Ombudsman if you feel that you have been treated unfairly or have received a poor service from your college or university and your complaint to that body has not been resolved to your satisfaction. However, you must normally use the college or university's complaints procedure before making a complaint to the Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman investigates your complaint and finds your college or university has been at fault, she can recommend appropriate action.

## What can you complain about?

The Ombudsman can only investigate complaints about maladministration. The term maladministration is not defined but can include unfairness, bias, or failing to follow rules or policies.

Examples of complaints the Ombudsman can consider include:

- Teaching and facilities
- Research supervision
- Student accommodation
- Giving advice that is misleading or inadequate
- Avoidable delay
- Faulty procedures or failing to follow the correct procedures
- Failure to apologise
- Mistakes in handling your complaint

## Is there anything the Ombudsman cannot investigate?

The Ombudsman can only deal with complaints about the administrative actions of colleges and universities. Please note, for complaints about universities, the complaint must be made by a student, or a person who has been a student.

The Ombudsman would not generally accept your complaint if:

- It is about academic judgement
- You make your complaint more than 6 months after completing the college or university's complaints procedure
- You could have gone to court or have already begun legal action
- The Ombudsman believes the action or decision you are complaining about was reasonable
- You have already made your complaint to the university's Visitor or Board of Visitors

*If you are unsure whether the Ombudsman can deal with your particular complaint, please contact our ASSIST team on 0800 343424.*

## How the Ombudsman will deal with your complaint

The Ombudsman can decide whether or not to accept a complaint for investigation.

An initial assessment will be made to decide if the Ombudsman has the legal authority to investigate your complaint. If your complaint cannot be accepted, you will be informed within 2 weeks.

If the Ombudsman has the legal authority to accept your complaint, ASSIST staff will decide if it should be investigated. This assessment involves ASSIST staff considering your complaint and the supporting evidence you have provided. We will usually seek further information from the college or university you have complained about. The college or university may also be asked about any proposals it may have to settle your complaint.

You will be informed of the Ombudsman's decision within 10 weeks from receipt of your complaint.

If the Ombudsman decides to investigate, your complaint will be passed to an investigation team to establish if there is any maladministration by the college or university you complained about. Where the Ombudsman finds maladministration, she may make recommendations about what should be done to put things right.

The Ombudsman will inform you of the result of the investigation.