



National University of Ireland, Galway
Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh

Student Counselling Service
Complaints Procedures (Part II) – Formal



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We hope you will find this document helpful in guiding you through the formal procedures for making a complaint about the Service. The Service also has informal procedures in place by means of which you can draw attention to problems and have these attended to. You can find out more about these procedures by reading the leaflet entitled *Complaints Procedures (Part I) – Informal*. Copies of these leaflets are displayed in the waiting area.

Aim of the Service

The Student Counselling 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. 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 have the right to reply
- The complainant has a right to representation
- There are separate processes for investigating the complaint and deciding on the outcome of the complaint
- If the complaint is about a counsellor, it will be dealt with by the Head of Service.
- If the complaint is about the Head of the Counselling Service, it will usually be dealt with by the Vice President for Student Services
- In the event that the investigator has a prior involvement or a conflict of interest, the matter will be dealt with in the first instance by the Vice President for Student Services. In the event of prior involvement by the Vice President for Student Services, an independent investigator will be appointed who will deal with the matter.

Professional standards for counselling

All counsellors employed in the Service are governed by the ethical codes for counselling. All student counsellors belong to IAUCC (Irish Association for University and College Counsellors) which has its own ethical guidelines. In addition, most counsellors are individual members of either ICP (Irish Council for Psychotherapy), PSI (Psychological Society of Ireland) or IACP (Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy). Honorary counsellors and trainee counsellors on placement, who do not have individual membership, sign an agreement to abide by the IAUCC's Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy.

You can readily access the above professional codes in the following ways:

- www.iauucc.ie
- Psychological Society of Ireland (www.psihq.ie) , Irish Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (www.irish-counselling.ie) , ICP
- By requesting paper copies directly from the Service.

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 will 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, then it must be addressed to the Head of the Counselling Service in the first instance.

Making a formal complaint about the professional conduct of a counsellor

If informal resolution is not possible, or you decline to use informal means, you can consider the following (contact details of all those referred to are listed at the end of this document):

Level 1: Student Counselling Service

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.

The counsellor involved will also be asked to submit his/her own account, including 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 10 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 your counsellor happens to be the Head of Counselling, then the Vice President for Student Services will manage the complaint.

Level 2

The Student Counselling Service, together with other Student Support Services, is under the remit of the Vice President for Student Services. If you consider that the complaint has not been adequately addressed at the first level, you can request a review by submitting your complaint in writing to the Vice President of Student Services. 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, 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)

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

Relevant contact details

Bea Gavin
Head of Counselling
Student Counselling Service, NUIG
5 Distillery Road
Galway
Ph: 091 492484
Mail: bea.gavin@nuigalway.ie

IAUCC
Irish Association for University and
College Counsellors
www.iaucc.ie

Mary O'Riordan
Vice President for Student Services,
Vice Presidents Office,
The Quadrangle,
NUI Galway
Ph: 091 492639
Mail: mary.oriordan@nuigalway.ie