



Complaints Procedure

The staff and counsellors at Hope Park Counselling Centre aim to provide a high-quality, accessible, counselling service.

If anyone is unhappy with any part of our service or has a concern or complaint to make, we would like to know about it as soon as possible in order to resolve the situation quickly. It is our commitment to make the complaint process as accessible and transparent as possible and to uphold a standard of acting upon complaints in an efficient and compassionate way. All concerns and complaints are treated seriously and in confidence.

It is hoped that complaints about an individual counsellor or about the way the service is delivered can be resolved with the counsellor, or, if appropriate, with the Director of Hope Park Counselling Centre.

Purpose of the Complaint Procedure

The complaints procedure is designed to ensure that:

- Individuals making a complaint about the Hope Park Counselling Centre or about anyone who works for Hope Park Counselling Centre are empowered to do so.
- Complaints are investigated promptly and appropriately and in accordance with the procedural steps set out in this document.
- Complaints are treated seriously and given due consideration while also ensuring that the subjects of a complaint are treated fairly and without prejudice pending the outcome of any investigation.

The purpose of the complaints procedure is also to:

- Determine whether a breach of the COSCA Statement of Ethics and Code of Practice has taken place and whether any action should be taken by Hope Park.

Aims of the Complaint Procedure

- To enable a complaint to be investigated in a fair and impartial manner
- To enable complaints to be resolved as quickly as possible
- To allow consequences of mistakes to be put right without unnecessary conflict
- To improve the quality of the service

Access to the Complaints Procedure

This complaints procedure can be accessed as follows:

- It can be viewed and downloaded as a PDF from the 'About Hope Park' section of the Hope Park Counselling Centre Website - [Hope Park Counselling Centre | Health in Social Sciences](#)
- A hardcopy is available in the reception area of Hope Park Counselling Centre.
- A hardcopy may be requested by phone, email, letter, or in person from the Hope Park Counselling Centre reception.
- If you require this document in an alternative format such as in large print, Braille, or for it to be translated into another language, please contact us at counselling@hopepark.org.uk
- The document can also be viewed in larger text and read out loud from our website using standard online tools.

Information about the Hope Park Counselling Centre Complaints Procedure is included in our Client Information. It is also provided to all staff, students/counsellors and supervisors as part of their Hope Park Counselling Centre Induction to ensure that everyone knows about this procedure.

What is a Complaint?

University of Edinburgh defines a complaint as: *'an expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action or about the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf.'*

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure.

Who Can Complain?

Anyone who receives, requests or is directly affected by, our services can make a complaint to us. This includes the representative of someone who is dissatisfied with the service (for example, a relative, friends, advocate or adviser). If you are making a complaint on someone else's behalf, you will need their written consent which acknowledges that personal information will be shared as part of the complaint handling procedure.

Anonymous complaints will be investigated by the Director of Hope Park Counselling Centre, who will use discretion in assessing what, if any, action, is to be taken. Generally, we will consider anonymous complaints if there is enough information in the complaint to enable us to make further enquires. Any decision not to pursue an anonymous complaint must be authorised by a senior member of staff (Head of Counselling, Psychotherapy and Applied Social Science).

If an anonymous complaint contains serious allegations, it will be referred to the University Complaint Handling Office (Academic Services, University of Edinburgh) for Stage 2 investigation (see below).

Any complaints that are deemed to be vexatious or malicious, whether anonymous or not, will be investigated by the Director, who will use discretion in assessing what, if any, action is to be taken.

Hope Park Counselling Centre expects all staff to behave in a professional manner and treat complainants with courtesy, respect and dignity. We also ask those bringing a complaint to treat our staff with respect. When these standards are not met by complainants, Hope Park Counselling Centre is guided by the University of Edinburgh's [Expected Behaviour Policy](#) (Complaint Handling Procedure, 2020).

Time Limits for Complaints

Complaints can be accepted up to **three years** from the time of the issue arising. If the complaint refers to specific client work the maximum is three years from the date the client ended counselling at Hope Park Counselling Centre. This may be extended further if the issue is deemed to be in the public interest (Professional Standards Authority, 2024).

How to Make a Complaint

If you are receiving counselling, we would encourage you to please try to talk your concerns over with your counsellor if you can. If this is not possible, or pertains to another matter relating to the service, please make your complaint to the Director. The Director will be responsible for managing the complaint. This can be in-person (by appointment), by telephone, or in writing by email or letter.

Alex Williams, Director
Hope Park Counselling Centre
8 Hope Park Square, Meadow Lane
Edinburgh EH8 9NW
Email: counselling@hopepark.org.uk
Telephone: 0131 650 6696

When raising your complaint, please tell us to the best of your ability:

- Your full name and contact details
- As much as you can about the complaint
- What has gone wrong; and
- What outcome you are seeking

If you have any difficulty making a complaint in person or in writing, please let us know and we will try to help you. You may also wish to contact AdvoCard for assistance. They are Edinburgh's advocacy service and can be contacted on 0131 554 5307, or via www.advocard.org.uk.

Scope of Complaints

Complaints made under this procedure may cover paid staff, trainee counsellors, board members, supervisors or others acting for or on behalf or as part of Hope Park Counselling Centre.

Hope Park is governed by the [COSCA Statement of Ethics and Code of Practice](#). The Complaints Procedure is guided by COSCA and The University of Edinburgh [Complaint Handling Procedure \(2020\)](#).

Complaints must be supported by sufficient evidence to enable an investigation and the Director will make an initial assessment of whether there is a case to answer.

Where a complaint is made against an individual who has left Hope Park Counselling Centre and is no longer affiliated with the University, no action can be taken against the individual(s) named in the complaint. In these circumstances however, complaints will be investigated for the learning of the Centre and may be able to address whether COSCA and/or University policy and practices were applied correctly. A report will always be submitted to COSCA even if sanctions cannot be applied. Wherever possible the person will be offered the opportunity to represent their own interests, and if they are still a member of COSCA, COSCA may investigate under their system for dealing with information about members.

Where a complaint has been made against an individual who has left Hope Park Counselling Centre but continues to be affiliated with the University as a staff member or student, the complainant will be directed towards the University Complaint Handling Team (Academic Services) or the University's Human Resources (HR) Department, as appropriate. In these circumstances however, complaints will be investigated for the learning of the Centre and may be able to address whether COSCA and/or University policy and practices were applied correctly.

Confidentiality and Communications

Every complaint will be treated with care and confidentiality. We will attempt to communicate clearly and directly with all complainants or their representatives in a timely manner as described below and determined by the Hope Park Counselling Centre's Complaint Procedure (2024) and the University of Edinburgh's Complaint Handling Procedure (2020).

The complainant is required to give permission for confidential information pertinent to the complaint to be disclosed to all parties cited in the complaint by those involved in handling the complaint. This permission will also extend to the member organisation who may, if necessary, access specialist or legal advice.

Where the complaint is about the actions of a staff member or representative of Hope Park Counselling Centre, the complaint will be shared with that individual, where possible, before responding (although this will not prevent us from responding to the complaint quickly).

Safety of Clients

At all times the client's safety will be a primary consideration. If a complaint relates to the conduct of a counsellor who is practicing at Hope Park Counselling Centre suspension of counselling and/or disciplinary proceedings may take place at any stage of the complaints process, if appropriate.

Stage 1: Frontline Resolution

At the time of the initial complaint, every opportunity will be taken to resolve the complaint informally and within **five working days** (if it will take longer to investigate your complaint, this will be discussed with the complainant). This may include a face-to-face meeting(s), telephone conversation(s), or written explanations of the reasons a decision has been taken.

The person complained against will be informed.

The Director will normally handle the complaint at this stage, but if the Director is the subject of the complaint or a conflict of interest is deemed to be present, then the Head of Counselling, Psychotherapy and Applied Social Sciences (University of Edinburgh) will step-in to respond to the complaint and manage the procedure.

The maximum response time for Stage 1 complaints is **10 working days**, and if it is not possible to meet this deadline, the complainant will be referred for consideration at stage 2.

The complainant and the individual complained against will always be communicated with regarding the process.

At the closure of the complaint, we will always make the complainant aware that they can escalate the complaint to stage 2 and provide guidance on how to do this.

In the event that a complaint relates to the ethics and provision of counselling and psychotherapy is not resolved satisfactorily by the Hope Park Counselling Centre and/or the University of Edinburgh, it is possible to make a complaint to COSCA **within one month** of the exhaustion of the process, under their Complaints Procedure (see below for guidance).

Stage 2: Formal complaint

Stage 2 Complaint Investigation is appropriate where attempts at Frontline Resolution have failed, where the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1, or where the issue is sufficiently complex, serious or high risk from the outset that frontline resolution would not be appropriate. Formal complaints are managed centrally by the University of Edinburgh Complaints Handling (Academic Services).

If you are considering a filing a Stage 2 complaint, you can familiarise yourself with the procedures here: [The procedure | University Secretary's Group](#)

To raise a formal Stage 2 Complaint: [Complaint handling procedure | The University of Edinburgh](#)

It is a condition of COSCA Organisational Membership that members already bound to a larger organisation's complaints procedure and unable to amend or implement their own (for example NHS services, Universities accountable to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) etc.) investigate breaches of COSCA's Statement of Ethics and Code of Practice under those complaints procedures and implement sanctions as required.

COSCA will investigate reports that this has failed to happen and, if upheld, will implement sanctions up to and including termination of membership. If the complaint is against an individual member of COSCA, COSCA may investigate under "Whistleblowing - system for dealing with information known to COSCA about members.

Monitoring of Complaints

A record will be kept of all complaints received. Anonymous complaints will also be recorded including the reasons for any decision to investigate or not investigate the complaint.

Complaints will be monitored regularly by the Director of Hope Park Counselling Centre, The School of Health in Social Science (University of Edinburgh), The Complaint's Handling office (Academic Services, University of Edinburgh), and COSCA.

Once a complaint has been concluded at Stage 1 the following reports will be submitted:

1. An "Outcome Report to COSCA at the Conclusion of Complaints Proceedings" will be submitted to COSCA within one month. COSCA will publish upheld complaints and their sanctions regarding COSCA.
2. The School of Health in Social Science requires a quarterly submission of all complaints received. These are logged, signed off by the Head of School and submitted to the University's Complaint Handling office (Academic Services).

Should a complaint go directly to Stage 2 (*Formal Complaint*) the Complaints Handling Office (Academic Services, University of Edinburgh) will advise the School of Health in Social Science, and the Director of Hope Park Counselling Centre will be informed. Upon the conclusion of the complaint, an "Outcome Report to COSCA at the Conclusion of Complaints Proceedings" will be submitted to COSCA by the Director of Hope Park Counselling Centre within one month. COSCA will publish upheld complaints and their sanctions regarding COSCA.

A complaint will be discontinued if the complainant fails or refuses to participate in any stage of the complaint procedure without good reason or the complainant formally withdraws the complaint. In these circumstances all parties will be informed.

What if I am Still Not Satisfied?

Complaints to COSCA

COSCA is the professional body for counselling and psychotherapy in Scotland.

In the event that a complaint which relates to the ethics and provision of counselling and psychotherapy is not resolved satisfactorily by the Hope Park Counselling Centre and/or the University of Edinburgh, it is possible to make a complaint to COSCA **within one month** of the exhaustion of the process, under their Complaints Procedure (see information below). Upon receipt of the complaint, COSCA will verify that the member's complaints procedure has been followed and the outcome was lawful, reasonable and properly explained.

[COSCA's Complaints Procedure](#)

COSCA

16 Melville Terrace, Stirling FK8 2NE

01786 475 140

info@cosca.org.uk

www.cosca.org.uk

Complaints to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

The SPSO is an independent body which oversees complaints and appeals processes within the university and other public institutions.

On reaching the end of the University's complaints process, the complainant will receive a letter detailing the outcome and explaining how to raise the complaint with the SPSO. If a complainant has exhausted all stages of the University Complaint Handling Procedure and the complainant is dissatisfied with the way in which the complaint has been handled by the University, there is the right to request a review through the office of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

The SPSO can only consider complaints after the University has issued its final decision on the complaint and issued Completion of Procedures.

Information on how to complain to the SPSO and on how it handles complaints can be found on the SPSO website: [Scottish Public Services Ombudsman website](#)