

Complaints Policy and Procedure for Callers of a Nightline

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Guidance

Defining Policy, Process and Procedure

For definitions for policy, process and procedure go to the policy template found [here](#).

Background

Callers of a Nightline have the right to complain if they are not fully satisfied with the service. This document contains information about the infrastructure Nightlines need to have to log a complaint, and the procedure for what to do if a complaint is made.

This example policy and procedure has been developed by the Nightline Association Policy Team to provide Nightlines with a template and guide for developing a policy and procedure.

It should be noted that this does not supersede any complaints policy that your parent body has implemented. As a general rule, if you are unsure about how to deal with a complaint it should be referred to your parent body.

To adhere to the General Data Protection Regulation, the complainant has the right to provide as much or as little detail as possible.

Resources and Research

Documents used to draft this policy:

- Good Practice Guidelines version 4
- University of St Andrews complaints handling procedure (accessed: August 2023)
- The Policy Team's previous Monitoring Feedback & Complaints Policy Guide created for Nightlines (2018 version)
- Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (accessed: August 2023)
- Australian Human Rights Commission: Good practice guidelines for internal complaint processes (accessed: August 2023)
- Equality and Human Rights: Service complaints policy and procedure (accessed: August 2023)

Good Practice Guidelines

The Good Practice Guidelines version 4 (GPG v4) has a section on this policy and procedure that you should read before creating your own policy. You can obtain the full document from the GPG Team (gpg@nightline.ac.uk) or by clicking [this](#) link for the info site.

The latest version of the GPGs state that:

GPGs relating to policy

Nightlines must:

- Clearly advertise how a caller can give feedback.
- Recognise that the service can get things wrong and make mistakes.
- Have a clear policy to deal with feedback and complaints from callers, volunteers, and stakeholders.
- Log all complaints made about the service.
- Have clear procedures to prevent perceived or actual conflicts of interest.
- Set out their misconduct and dismissal procedures clearly.
- Avoid unfairly targeting individual volunteers for widespread behaviours.
- Communicate that volunteers can be stopped from taking calls.
- Respond to complaints within a publicised timeline.
- Outline findings of fact and any actions taken as a result of the complaint.
- Have an appeal process built into the complaints policy.

Nightlines should:

- Allow callers to give feedback through any channel that they can access the service.

Definitions

Term(s)	Definition
Volunteer	Anyone who has successfully completed training and signed the Nightline Volunteer Agreement.
Complaint	Any statement received from a caller that the service received from Nightline was unsatisfactory.
Calls, callers and contacts	Anyone who uses the service through any format, such as via instant messaging (IM), phone calls, emails or in person walk-ins.

Purpose

This guidance allows for Nightlines to have a policy and procedure that allows them to deal with complaints made about the service.

Scope

This policy applies to all listening volunteers, committee members, and anyone who uses the service.

Policy Considerations

When drafting this policy, the following factors should be considered:

- How much responsibility the Nightline will take on and when complaints should be referred to the police or Nightline parent body (this will likely be your Students' Union/Guild or University.,
- How often the policy will be reviewed and by whom.
- Who will monitor, review and draft improvements based upon the complaints.
- How the complaints process will work and what to do if complaints cannot be resolved immediately.

Roles and Responsibilities

This policy should be reviewed at least once per year. The person reviewing it should be named by their title. For example, Coordinator or Chair.

Contact information

Query	NLA Contact	E-Mail Address
Any questions relating to this policy	Policy Team	policy@nightline.ac.uk
Stakeholder issues	Sustainability Team	sustainability@nightline.ac.uk
Service Level Agreement (SLA) advice	SLA Sub-Team	sla@nightline.ac.uk
IT questions and issues	IT Department	it@nightline.ac.uk
Welfare support	Welfare Team	welfare@nightline.ac.uk
Training advice	Training Team	training@nightline.ac.uk
Research carried out for this policy	Policy Team	policy@nightline.ac.uk

Complaints for Callers Policy

Policy approved	Month YYYY <i>[add details of relevant committee members, etc. if required]</i>
Policy review due	Month YYYY
Any other info?	

Purpose

This policy outlines what [X] Nightline needs to do when a complaint arises from a caller and if an issue occurs, how long a caller has to make a complaint. This includes how to respond to a complaint, who manages them, how complaints can be made and how complaints can be escalated. A complaint may happen for different reasons. This list contains some examples but is not exhaustive:

- Failure to provide the service promised.
- Inadequate quality of service or unreasonable delay in providing the service.
- Conduct of a volunteer.

Scope

This policy applies to all volunteers, members of the committee and callers.

[X] Nightline must only manage complaints that are about how the service is being delivered (such as not being allowed to suggest what the caller should do). This should only relate to complaints claiming volunteers have broken [X] Nightline's policies which pose very little concern to the integrity of the Nightline or parent body. Any complaints outside of this remit, and any that are considered worthy of police, university or Students' Union investigation, must be referred to the police, university or Students' Union accordingly.

Any serious, high risk or high profile complaints must be escalated to the *[insert parent body here]*. These include but are not limited to

- Involve a death or terminal illness
- Generate significant and/or on going press interest
- Pose a reputational or legal risk to [X] Nightline or its parent body
- Present issues of a highly sensitive nature
- Directly relate to a policy of [X] Nightline's parent body

Policy statement

[Roles and responsibilities](#)

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Roles and Responsibilities

Below is an example list of what roles and responsibilities each committee member and volunteers of the Nightline should have. Edit this as deemed necessary.

Committee member	Responsibilities
Coordinator	This person has the following responsibilities: - Primarily responsible for oversight of the complaints. - Either handle the complaint in conjunction with the Designated Complaints Reviewer or refer to the necessary body such as the Student's Union or police. - Along with the Designated Complaints Reviewer, will look at complaints that have occurred in the last six months and suggest any necessary changes in policy or process to the committee to prevent problems from occurring.
Designated Complaints Reviewer	This person has the following responsibilities: - Reviewing the complaint alongside the Coordinator, or in their stead if the Coordinator is unable. - Responding to a complainant within 72 hours to confirm receipt of the complaint. - Corresponding with the complainant to get a clear understanding of the complaint and issue. - Sending details of the outcome to the complainant, along with details of how to lodge an appeal. - Looks at complaints that have occurred in the last six months, identifies recurring themes and offers solutions to prevent problems from occurring. - Is responsible for reviewing this policy every 12 months. - Investigates all complaints and writes the internal report. If there is a conflict of interest, this will be done by the Coordinator or another committee member. If there is still conflict of interest then another member of the committee or [insert parent body] must perform the investigation.
Other committee member	Where there is a conflict of interest from both the Coordinator and Designated Complaints Reviewer, another committee member must be nominated to escalate the issue.
Volunteer	This person may be called on to take receipt of complaint in the first instance. In such an instance they should either resolve the issue immediately or refer on as required.

Reviews and amendments

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List any changes to this policy that need to be recorded for historical purposes.

E.g. May 2021: changed wording on ____, updated definitions

Complaints for Callers Procedure

How complaints can be made

- Complaints can be made by social media, IM, over the phone, via email, via [\[insert electronic form used such as Google Forms\]](#), [\[or in person \(delete if your Nightline does not have an option to complain in person such as doing face-to-face talks on shift or not having members of the committee known to be part of the Nightline\)\]](#). The issue must have occurred within the last [\[six\]](#) months.
- Complaints can be made anonymously by the complaints form but no follow up will be made to the complainant. However, an investigation must still occur.

Complaints via social media

- If a complaint is made via social media, such as on Facebook or Twitter, about [\[X\]](#) Nightline, will refer the complaint to [\[insert email address or online form for complaints here\]](#) using official Nightline social media channels. The following text can be used:

“I am sorry to hear about this issue. We would like to hear more about this and solve the problem as soon as possible. Can you please send an email to [\[insert complaints email here\]](#) or fill out the form found on our website [\[insert link to complaints form here\]](#). A member of the team will be in touch within 72 hours of you contacting us.”

- In exceptional circumstances where the complaint is common and affects many people, such as the Nightline closing for one or more nights, then an appropriate response can be made, such as an apology using official Nightline social media channels.

Complaints made directly to a volunteer

- In the first instance, if a complaint is made to the volunteer and it is a straightforward and simple issue requiring no investigation, the volunteer's response should be the following: An on-the-spot apology, explanation or other appropriate action. If they are not satisfied with the response, the complainant can be signposted to email [\[insert complaints email address or Nightline generic email address here\]](#) or complaints form so the Coordinators can read the complaint and decide upon the next steps.
- Examples of straightforward and simple issues can be found below but this is not an exhaustive list:
 - The opening times of the Nightline not being sufficient for the caller
 - How long the caller waited for on IM or phone before the volunteer spoke to them
 - Why the volunteer cannot give advice or tell the caller what to do
 - Why the volunteer keeps on asking questions
 - The tone the volunteer spoke to the caller
 - If the caller didn't like a question asked by the volunteer
- If the user expresses an interest in continuing to use the service but does not want to speak to the current volunteer, then the conversation must continue by handing over to another volunteer who is on shift. This can be followed both for phone calls and IMs.
- If a contact is made via IM, and the caller is not interested in continuing to use the service they may be offered the opportunity to complain via email or by filling out the complaints

form. The complaint can email [\[insert complaints email address or Nightline generic email address here\]](#).

- All complaints, resolved immediately or not, must be recorded with consent of the complainant in [\[insert recording software here such as Google Forms\]](#) with all details of the complainant anonymised. Access must be made available to current and future committee members along with the [\[insert parent body here such as the Student's Union\]](#) upon request.
- All vexatious complaints must be electronically documented and escalated to the [\[insert parents body here such as Student's Union\]](#)

Complaints being referred or made online

- If complaints are not immediately resolved the caller can be told to write to [\[insert complaints email address or Nightline generic email address here\]](#) or fill out the form on [\[X\]](#) Nightline's website. It is not necessary for the complainant to send an email about their complaint and fill the form but completing the form will be mutually beneficial to both the complainant and Nightline so should therefore be encouraged. The complainant has the right to provide as much or as little detail as possible such as their full name and email address.
- Complaints can also be made directly to [\[insert complaints email address or Nightline generic email address here\]](#) or the complaints form on [\[X\]](#) Nightline's website can be filled out. These are monitored by the Coordinator and Designated Complaints Reviewer who both have access.
- If the complaint is made via email or via the complaint form, it must be acknowledged within [\[72\]](#) hours with explanation of the complaint process and a solution must be suggested within [\[30\]](#) days of receiving the complaint. Complaints must be logged electronically where Coordinators, the Designated Complaints Reviewer, future Coordinators and, if required, the Student Union can access them. This must be communicated to the complainant in the form through which they lodge the complaint. It must also be made clear they are free to include any level of detail they are comfortable with in the form, and that all details will be anonymised on completion of the investigation. Details of the contents of the complaints form can be found in Appendix 1.
- Explanation of the complaint process must contain:
 - That the process is confidential and that the complaint along with who has complained will only be mentioned to the necessary parties. If it is believed it cannot be handled by the Nightline then it will be escalated to [\[insert parent body here such as the Student's Union\]](#).
 - Explain where records of the complaint are kept, why they are kept and for how long. [\[It is important to discuss with your parent body how long you want to hold identifiable information. GDPR requires holding identifiable information for only as long as is necessary for the purpose for which you received that data \(in this instance, addressing a complaint\). Unless your Nightline is receiving many similar complaints and it believes it might be from the same person, then complaints, along with any identifiable information, should be promptly removed. However, complaints can be held for a period to time to see how the service can be improved and review complaints that have occurred. If your Nightline wants to review complaints then we recommend to anonymise the complaint once it has been resolved and keep the complaint for how long you and the parent body see fit. In the email example below\]](#)

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we state to keep complaints on file for three years but this can be adjusted to your needs.]

- What occurs if the complaint is deemed vexatious.
- Alternative organisations they can contact.

Below is an example of explaining the complaint process to the complainant:

“Dear [X],

Thank you for reaching out to us and we would like to apologise that our service has not met your standards. We have started to conduct an internal review of what has occurred and will aim to get back to you with a possible solution via email within [30] days by an impartial party. If it is felt that we cannot handle the issue or that the complaint is vexatious then we will send it to [insert parent body here].

All details you have provided us will remain confidential and will only be revealed to the necessary parties. Complaints are kept on file within a password protected programme that only certain members of [X] Nightline can access. The complaint, along with the internal report, will be kept on file for [three] years to ensure we can refer to past issues and learn from any complaints and so we can refer to any past complaints made by the same person. Once the complaint has been resolved we will promptly anonymise the details of the complaint. We will give a fair and balanced description of what happened, what conclusions we have reached on your complaint and how we reached those conclusions. If we are able to put things right, we will try to. If we cannot, we will be open and honest apologies, say what went wrong and why, and what we will do to improve in the future.

We would like to thank you again for bringing up this issue. If you would still like to contact a listening service other than [X] Nightline you can contact [Samaritans on 116 123 who are open 24/7 365 days a year or CALM on 0800 58 58 58 who are open 5pm–midnight every day.]”

Who handles the complaints

- All complaints made are reviewed by the Coordinators and other nominated members of committee (such as the Designated Complaints Reviewer). If these people are considered to have a conflict of interest (such as being in a relationship with the volunteer in question) a different person must be nominated to investigate. If it pertains to a volunteer not following a policy, then the discipline and dismissal policy may be used.
- If the caller does not like the service, then the service may choose to review the feedback and incorporate it as a potential way to improve the service.
- Complaints that are about how the service is being delivered (such as not being allowed to suggest what the contact should do) or any allegations which are not considered serious about how the volunteer spoke to the caller can be handled by the Nightline. Any complaints outside of this remit or ones that are considered worthy of police or university investigation must be referred to the police or university accordingly.

During the investigation

- If the complaint is made about a volunteer, the following must be adhered to:

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- Whilst the investigation is being undertaken the volunteer must be informed via email that a complaint has been made about them with details of the allegation.
- They must stop working for the Nightline whilst the investigation is undergoing.
- They must be informed that they will be given the opportunity to respond to the allegations, how the complaints process will occur and that it is confidential.
- How long the record of the complaint and investigation will be kept and where.
- That they must not discuss the investigation with any members of the committee carrying out the investigation, nor should they with the caller if they know them.
- Below is an example of what can be said to the respondent:

"Dear [X],

It has come to our attention that a complaint has been made about you. The complaint states [enter when the complaint was made and what it states]. We have started an internal investigation about this and the Designated Complaints Reviewer will give you the opportunity to respond to the allegation via email at a later date.

The complaint process will begin with the Designated Complaints Reviewer gathering information about what has occurred. They will then contact you to hear your account. Once we have gathered all the information we deem necessary the Coordinator and Designated Complaints Reviewer will meet and discuss the most fair outcome. We will aim to get back to you within [30] days of the outcome but in the meantime you must stop volunteering for [X] Nightline until a solution has been reached. We will inform you via email if and when you can start volunteering again.

The complaint and internal review document will be kept for [three] years [on other password protected software] where only the Coordinator and Designated Complaints Reviewer can access it. Once the complaint has been resolved all details will be promptly anonymised. This will allow us to refer back to any past issues we have had relating to this specific complaint and offer solutions for the future.

Please do not discuss the investigation with any members of the committee including those investigating the complaint (or other volunteers against whom the complaint has been levied) or, if you know them, the caller.

We understand that this can be a distressing process but want to assure you that this will be kept confidential. If you feel like you would like to access support we recommend you talk to [insert university wellbeing service here]."

- Any statements given by volunteers or complainants must include written confirmation that they have answered truly to the best of their knowledge. The investigators will state their neutrality during the investigation in any subsequent report.
- If the complaint is not about a specific volunteer then no one needs to be suspended from the Nightline but an investigation must occur and a report must be created.
- An electronic report must be written stating findings of fact and any actions taken because of the complaint. Coordinators, future Coordinators, the Designated Complaints Reviewer, and Student Union, must be able to access this if necessary, with the requisite consent from

both volunteer and complainant. This must be kept on file for a minimum of **[three]** years with details anonymised once the complaint has been resolved.

Contents of the report

- Once a complaint is made, an electronic internal report must be created as part of the investigation by the Designated Complaints Reviewer. The report must be made via a **[Word document saved somewhere current and future Coordinators and Designated Complaints Reviewer can access]** and kept for **[three]** years.

Details of what the report must include:

- Time and date of call
- What mode it was taken in (call, IM, email or in person)
- If it is about a volunteer, details of the volunteer
- Details of investigator's role
- Details of what occurred/facts as ascertained from investigation
- What the complainant wants
- Actions taken by Nightline in response to the complaint including when the complaint was acknowledged
- What the solution was and why that particular solution was offered
- Any learnings from the complaint and, if necessary, any policy changes that have occurred as a result from the complaint

After the investigation

- The results of the investigation must be sent in writing to the contact via email from the official email address of the Nightline.
 - This email must contain the following:
 - State clearly why the complaint was raised and what the complainant wanted to achieve from the complaint.
 - Empathetic language
 - State how the complaint was investigated and what evidence was used e.g. interviews with other volunteers.
 - State if something went wrong, why it went wrong, what the Nightline learnt from it and apologise.
 - If nothing went wrong, provide evidence such as explanations of policies, and clearly explain your reasoning.
 - State the specific date the complainant must respond by.
 - [If your Nightline has members of the committee publicly known to the part of your Nightline, then the following may be an option]** Offer to meet with the complainant if they would like to discuss the outcome and explain it.
- Once a solution has been suggested, **[X]** Nightline must wait for the complainant's response. If the complainant is satisfied with the outcome, the investigation can be closed. If they are not then the complaint must be escalated to **[insert parent body]**. If the complainant does not respond for **[30]** days after a solution has been suggested, then the investigation can be closed.
- The appeals procedure must be stated in the email the complainant is being sent.
- If the complaint is resolved, it must be clearly documented in the internal report on how it was resolved, what action was agreed and the complainant's agreement to this as the final outcome. This must be documented on an electronic platform so future Coordinators,

Designated Complaints Reviewer and the [insert parent body such as the Student Union] can access it.

How to write an apology

For information on how to write an apology you can use either the [Scottish Services Ombudsman](#) or the [Parliamentary and Health Services Ombudsman](#).

Vexatious complaints

Vexatious complaints are complaints that are considered abusive or unreasonably persistent and by doing so it may hinder the Nightline's ability to investigate the complaint or the complaints of others. This behaviour may occur at any time before, during or after a complaint has been investigated.

The following are examples of vexatious complaints but this is not an exhaustive list:

- Making complaints that are abusive, threatening or harm the wellbeing of those receiving the complaint.
- Complaints that are persistent and do not allow adequate time to be processed.
- The complaint has unreasonable demands.
- A complaint that provides falsified information.

If this occurs then the complaint must be escalated to [insert parent body contact details here] immediately.

Out of hours arrangements

[X] Nightline is out of office during university holidays. During this time, it must be stated that complaints will be dealt with along normal timelines once the service has reopened. If a complaint is made via email or form the following out of hours email can be sent:

"Hello,

Thank you for reaching out to [X] Nightline. We are currently not operating because of [insert holiday season here including the dates the Nightline closed and will open again]. We will respond back in [72] hours after we have opened acknowledging your complaint."

Appeals

- If the complainant is not satisfied with the solution offered by the volunteer, then the complaint must be escalated to the committee via an electronic method [such as a Google Form, or email] by either the complainant or volunteer.
- If the complainant is not satisfied with the solution provided by the committee, then it must be escalated to the [insert parent body here] via email on [insert email address of parent body here]. Details of the complaint do not need to be anonymised when escalating to the parent body.

When to escalate to the Nightline Association

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The Nightline Association can help when a caller complains about a volunteer or about the Nightline. However, the Association will usually only deal with the following types of complaint regarding Affiliated Nightlines:

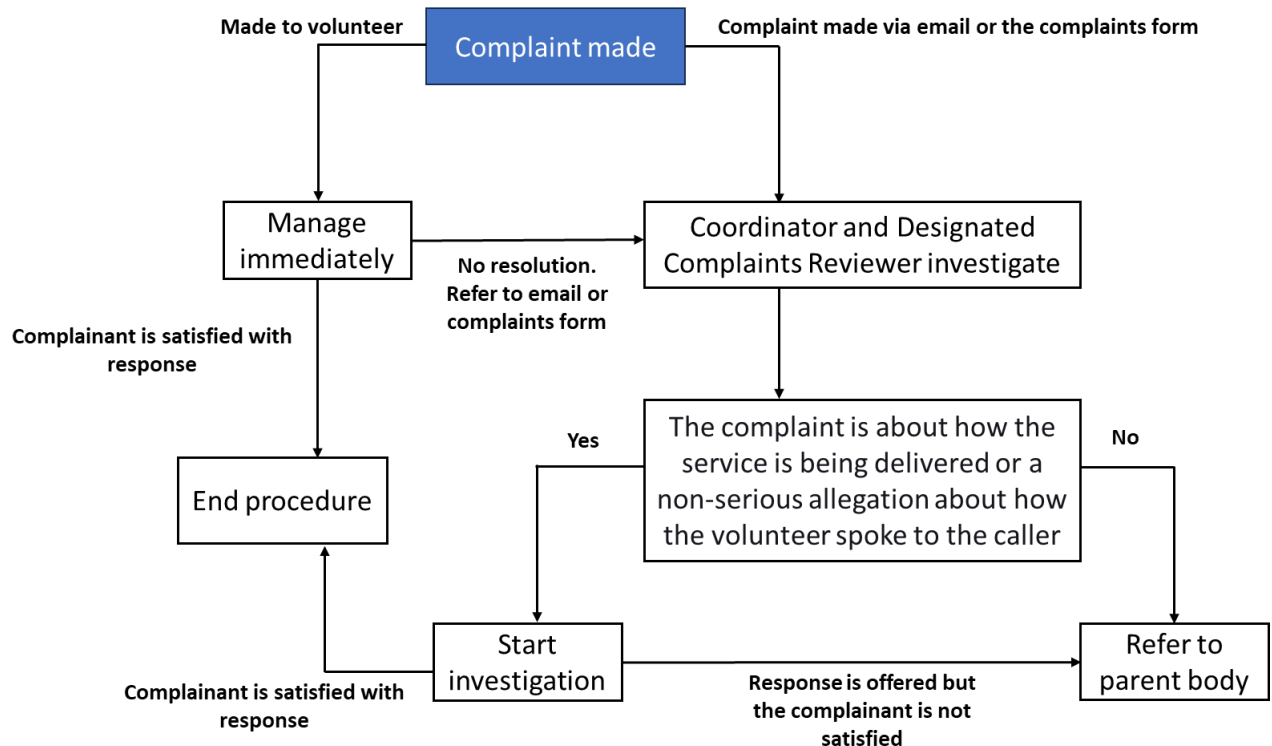
- There is no parent body, and you are unsatisfied with how the Nightline has dealt with your complaint or there is no clear complaints procedure for you to follow.
- You believe that poor practices of the Nightline pose a potential risk to its own volunteers or service users.
- Serious allegations against volunteers involved with delivering the listening service (e.g. allegations of abuse or sexual abuse)
- Dismissal of Committee members or volunteers involved with delivering the listening service (except for minor misconduct)

If one of these requirements are met, then please escalate to the safeguarding team (safeguarding@nightline.ac.uk). Please ensure that all identifiable information is removed before reporting the incident to the Association such as the person's name and position within the Nightline.

When forwarding the complaint to the Association the following information must be included:

- As much detail of the incident or situation as possible (without identifying anyone involved)
- Confirmation that it has been reported to your parent body (if there is a parent body)
- What action (if any) you or your parent body have already taken

Process



Appendix 1

[X] Nightline's Complaints Form

Information for all users

This form is used to receive complaints about [X] Nightline. We will acknowledge your complaint within [72] hours via email and have a response to your complaint within [30] days. The complaint must be made within [six] months of when the complainant knew there was an issue. If it is felt that the Nightline cannot handle the complaint, it will be escalated to the [Student's Union or insert other parent body]. Please note, complaints that are deemed vexatious will be escalated to the [Student's Union or insert other parent body].

Any relevant documents or history of earlier interactions with [X] Nightline about this issue must be submitted with this form to ensure the complaint can be handled as swiftly as possible. All details within this form be kept confidential and only revealed to necessary parties. Any identifying details will be anonymised immediately upon completion of the investigation. This form can be filled out anonymously but there will be no acknowledgement of the complaint or an offer of a resolution. We will however still undertake an investigation.

Section 1: Personal details

Full name

University email address

Telephone number

Section 2: Your complaint

- A) Give a summary of the complaint below including details of when this issue arises and the mode it occurred in such as phone call, email or via instant messaging (300 words maximum)
- B) Please describe what action if any you have taken to pursue the complaint up to now and whom you have dealt with in the Nightline in this regard (250 words maximum)
- C) Please give a brief explanation of the outcomes of your earlier pursuit if any of the complaint and what issues you consider to be unresolved (300 words maximum).
- D) Please describe precisely how you would like your complaint to be resolved (200 words maximum).
- E) If you are submitting a complaint more than [six] months following the last related incident, please provide a brief explanation for the delay (200 words maximum).

Section 3: Supporting documentation

Please insert any supporting documents below.