

Complaints Policy and Procedure for Volunteers of a Nightline

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Created:	September 2023	Next review:	August 2026
Version:	1.0		
Related documents:	Safeguarding document		

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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

Volunteers of a Nightline have the right to complain if they are not fully satisfied with how the service is being run or if they think another volunteer is not following a policy. 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 by a volunteer.

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. We recommend that your parent body reviews all of your policies, including those written by the Nightline Association, and amends them as they seem fit with your Nightline's input.

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
- Oxford Nightline Complaints Policy

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:

- 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.

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 or member of the Nightline from another volunteer.

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 volunteer and if an issue occurs, how long a volunteer 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 or member of committee.

It is essential that volunteers and members of committee feel comfortable with making a complaint so the complaint procedure should be easy, be known to all members of the Nightline and if desired can be done through an anonymous medium such as by filling out a form.

Scope

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

[X] Nightline must only manage complaints that are about how the service is being delivered (such as not attending to a call or IM or the volunteer suggesting to a caller what to 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. All issues related to the behaviour of volunteers with each other should be escalated to [insert parent body] immediately.

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](#)

[Reviews and amendments](#)

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 or referring complaint to the governing body. - 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 spoken to about their conduct directly from another volunteer. In such an instance they should either resolve the issue

	immediately (this is an informal complaint) or refer on as required (this is a formal complaint).
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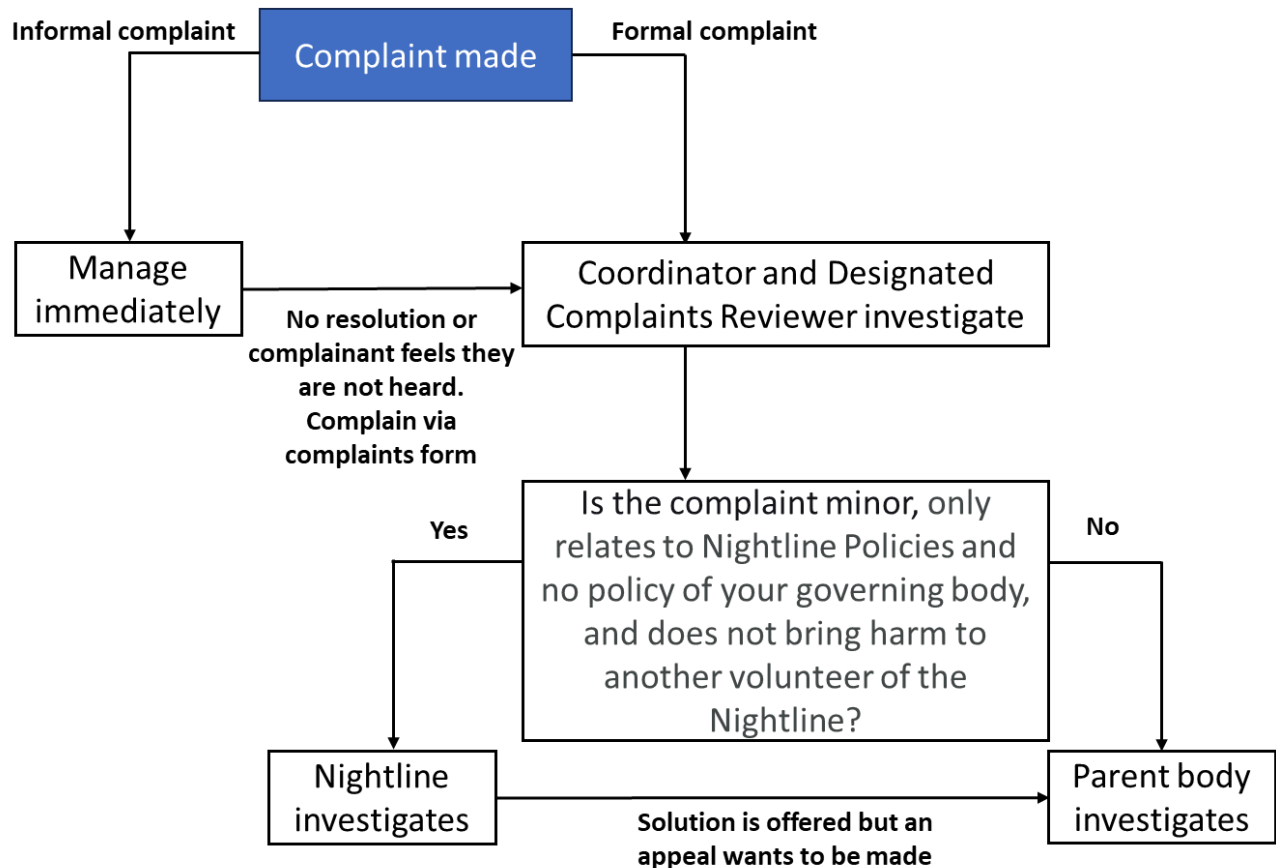
Reviews and amendments

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

Process Flowchart:



How complaints can be made

- Complaints can be made by via email, via [insert electronic form used such as Google Forms], or in person to a member of committee. The issue must have occurred within the last [six] months.
- If a member of committee wants to make a complaint to another member of committee then the complaint must be sent to [insert parent body]. This can be done by contacting [insert contact information of parent body that will handle the complaint such as an email address]
- Complaints made about another volunteer can be made anonymously by the complaints form but no follow up will be made to the complainant. However, an investigation must still occur.

Types of complaints

Informal complaints

- These are complaints that one volunteer gives to another (for example, during a shift). These will be very minor issues that can be resolved by the volunteers discussing the problem with one another. These complaints do not need to be logged or referred to anyone else unless the complainant feels they are not being heard. A non-exhaustive list has been put below. If the complainant is in any doubt of what to do or they feel they are not being heard, they should log a formal complaint.
 - A newly qualified volunteer asks a question to a caller that is not appropriate. This could be asking a question that does not progress the conversation any further or a question that should not be asked but does not cause any harm to the caller. This scenario should be used as a learning opportunity for the complainee.
 - Bringing food into the office that has a bad odour.
 - Keeping the other volunteer awake as they are having a conversation with someone on their personal phone.
 - How long the caller waited for on IM or phone before the volunteer spoke to them
 - Accidentally giving advice or telling the caller what to do
 - The tone the volunteer spoke to the caller
 - Not cleaning the communal office spaces, bathroom and bedrooms

Formal complaints

- Formal complaints are used if an informal complaint has been made and the complainant has not been heard or a severe issue has occurred that either the parent body or committee need to resolve. If it is necessary to perform disciplinary action then [X] Nightline's parent body should evaluate the complaint at hand and perform any disciplinary action they deem necessary.
- A non-exhaustive list of what constitutes a formal complaint can be seen below:
 - Harassment of any nature including sexual, physical and racial.
 - Bullying in any form from one volunteer to another or from a volunteer to a caller.
 - Malicious misuse of the volunteers position to the caller such as intentionally asking questions that harm the callers wellbeing.
 - Not following policies set out by [X] Nightline after discussing that the policy should be followed.

- Formal complaints must be recorded with consent of the complainant in [\[insert recording software here such as Google Forms for complaints specifically from \[X\] Nightline volunteers\]](#). 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.

Vexatious complaints

- All vexatious complaints must be electronically documented and escalated to the [\[insert parents body here such as Student's Union\]](#). More details can be found in the [Vexatious complaints](#) section.

Complaints being referred or made online

- If a formal complaint is by 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 [\[X Nightline's parent body\]](#) 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 complaints about or from the same person, then complaints, along with any identifiable information, should be promptly removed.\]](#)
 - Below is an example of explaining the complaint process to the complainant:

"Dear [\[X\]](#),

Thank you for reaching out to us and making us aware that there is a potential issue with a volunteer. 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

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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."

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. Please refer to this policy [here](#).
- Complaints that are deemed to be minor and do not have significant impact on the service or the parent body can be managed by the Nightline. A non-exhaustive list of examples of this can be seen under the [Complaints made directly to a volunteer](#) section of this procedure. Any complaints outside of this remit, including formal complaints that are serious, or ones that are considered worthy of police or university investigation must be referred to the police or university accordingly. Please contact the **[insert parent body]** here: **[insert parent body email address who will handle Nightline's complaints]**

During the investigation

Complaints escalated to the parent body

- If the complaint is made about a volunteer and it has been escalated to the parent body, the following must be adhered to:
 - 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 sent to the complainee:

"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]**. The **[insert parent body here]** have started an internal investigation about this and they will give you the opportunity to respond to the allegation at a later date.*

*The complaint process will begin with the **[insert parent body here]** 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 **[insert parent body here]** will meet and discuss the most fair outcome. They 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*

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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 [include detail about how long information on investigations are held by your parental body, if they are anonymised, and at what point they are destroyed].

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].”

Complaints handled by the Nightline

- If the complaint is made about a volunteer and is handled by [X] Nightline, the following must be adhered to:
 - 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 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 volunteer who lodged the complaint and any other volunteers who are subject to complaints
- 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.
- 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.
- Below is an example of what can be sent via email to the complainee:

“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.

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].”

Contents of the report

- If a complaint is managed by [X] Nightline, an electronic internal report must be created as part of the investigation by the Designated Complaints Reviewer. The report must be made via a [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 incident(s)
- 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 and actions taken with the volunteer who is subject to complaint
- 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

- If a complaint is managed by [X] Nightline, 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 or reviewing policies.
 - State the next steps, if any, the Nightline will take with regard to the volunteer who has been complained about. If no steps are to be taken, explain this.
 - State the specific date the complainant must respond by.

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- Offer to meet with the complainant if they would like to discuss the outcome and explain it. If this occurs a summary of the conversation must be sent to the complainant or complainee from [\[insert Nightline complaints email address here\]](#).
- 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 complainee feels they are being unjustly punished by the Nightline then the complaint can be escalated to the parent body. The complainee should contact [\[insert contact details of parent body here\]](#).
- 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.
- If the complaint is upheld [\[X\]](#) Nightline may want to refer to the [Dismissal and Discipline Policy](#) to help manage their next steps regarding that volunteer.

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 the form the following out of hours response can be made:

"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 [insert parent body] Details of the complaint do not need to be anonymised when escalating to the parent body.

When to escalate to the Nightline Association

The Nightline Association can help when a volunteer complains about another volunteer. 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)
- Volunteers self-harming, attempting suicide, or suffering other mental health issues where this occurs:
 - During a shift
 - Immediately before or after a shift

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

Appendix 1

[X] Nightline's Complaints Form for Volunteers

Information for all users

This form is used to receive complaints about [X] Nightline's volunteers. 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 (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.