



Complaints Handling Performance Report

2023/24

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Introduction

1. The University operates its complaints handling in line with the Higher Education Model Complaints Handling Procedure published by the [Scottish Public Services Ombudsman](#) (SPSO). The guidance and information on the University's Complaints Handling Procedure can be found at the '[Complaints](#)' section of the University website.
2. The purpose of this document is to report on the University's Complaints Handling Performance in the 2023/24 academic year (1 August 2023- 31 July 2024) in line with Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and in respect of complaint trends, and actions in response to complaints.

Overview of the Complaints Handling Procedure

3. The University's Complaints Handling Procedure involves up to two stages.

Stage One – Frontline Response

Seeks to respond to straightforward complaints swiftly and effectively at the source of the concern or issue.

Stage Two – Investigation

Appropriate where a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of frontline resolution and requires escalation, or where frontline resolution is not possible or appropriate due to the complexity or seriousness of the case.

4. These two stages represent the full scope of the University's complaint procedure. Where a complainant remains dissatisfied at the conclusion of the University's consideration of a complaint, a request can be made to the SPSO for an independent review of the complaint. The SPSO is the final stage for complaints about universities in Scotland.

Complaints Received

5. The University welcomes the opportunities for learning and reflection that complaints create and continues to focus on ensuring that students and other members of the University community are made aware of and have ready access to the Complaints Handling Procedure.
6. During the 2023/24 academic year the University received a total of 248 complaints, broken down as follows:

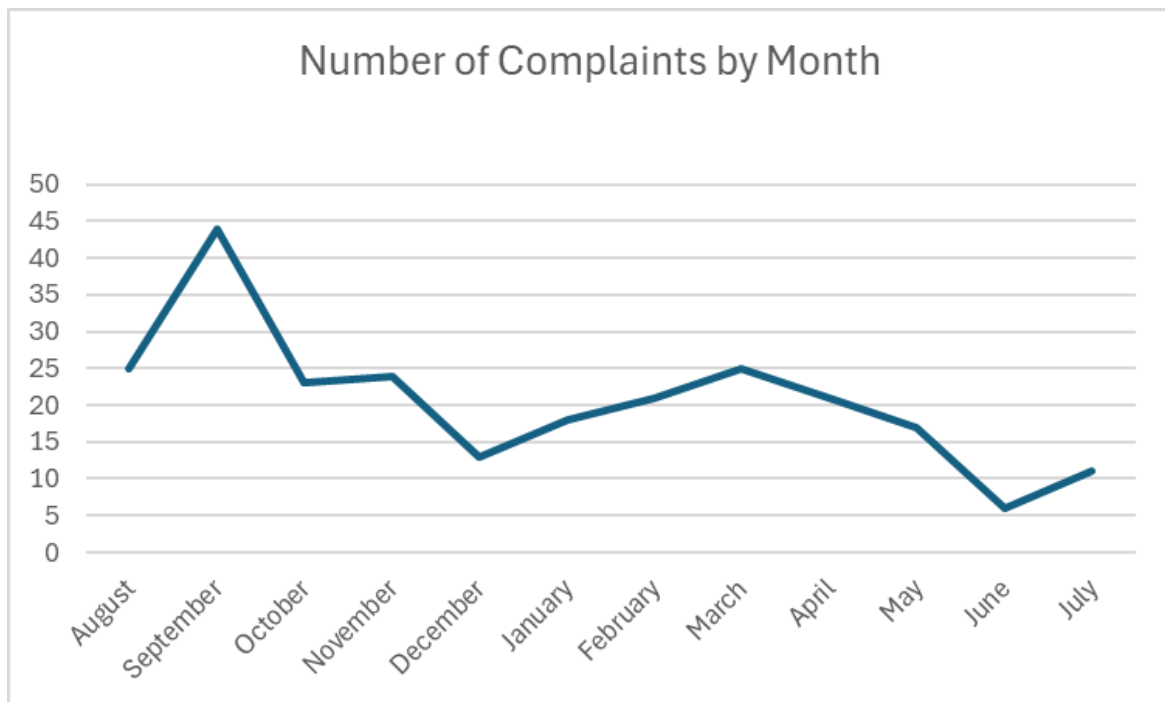
Total number of complaints	248
Received as a Stage 1 complaint	175
Escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2 complaint	11
Received as a Stage 2 complaint	19
Referred to another University Procedure (such as Academic Appeals or Student Discipline)	25
Not a valid complaint	18

7. The overall total number of complaints received in 2023/24 represents a decrease of approximately 12.5% compared to 2022/23, when a total of 283 complaints were received.
8. Within the overall decrease in complaint numbers in 2023/24, there was a reduction of approximately 24% in the number of complaints received as a Stage 1 complaint and approximately 37% in the number of complaints received as a Stage 2 complaint. Despite the reduction in the total volume of complaints, it should be noted that the University experienced increases in volumes of information and documentation supplied to support a complaint, and as a result, the complexity in dealing with complaints continued to expand.
9. The total number of complaints received from students during 2023/24 was 133, representing a decrease of approximately 20% compared to 2022/23 when 166 complaints were received from students. In the same period, the University's student population decreased by 4.5%. The proportion of University students who submitted a complaint continued to represent less than 1% of the student body. Approximately 52% of the total complaints received were from students which compares to 59% in 2022/23.
10. The total of 248 complaints were received from complainants as follows:

Category of Complainant	Number of Complaints	Proportion of Total Complaints	Variance in Proportion from 2022/23
Applicant	29	11.7%	-3.8%
Undergraduate Student	72	29.0%	-11.6%
Postgraduate Taught Student	51	20.6%	+3.7%
Postgraduate Research Student	7	2.8%	+1.7%
INTO Student	3	1.2%	N/A
External Individual Advocating on behalf of a Student	1	0.4%	-0.7%
Parent/Carer/Guardian of a Student or Applicant	24	9.7%	+3.7%
University Staff Member	5	2.0%	+1.3%
University Alumni	3	1.2%	+0.8%
Member of the Public	46	18.6%	+2.0%
Unidentified Individuals	7	2.8%	+1.7%
Total	248	100%	

Timing of Complaints Received

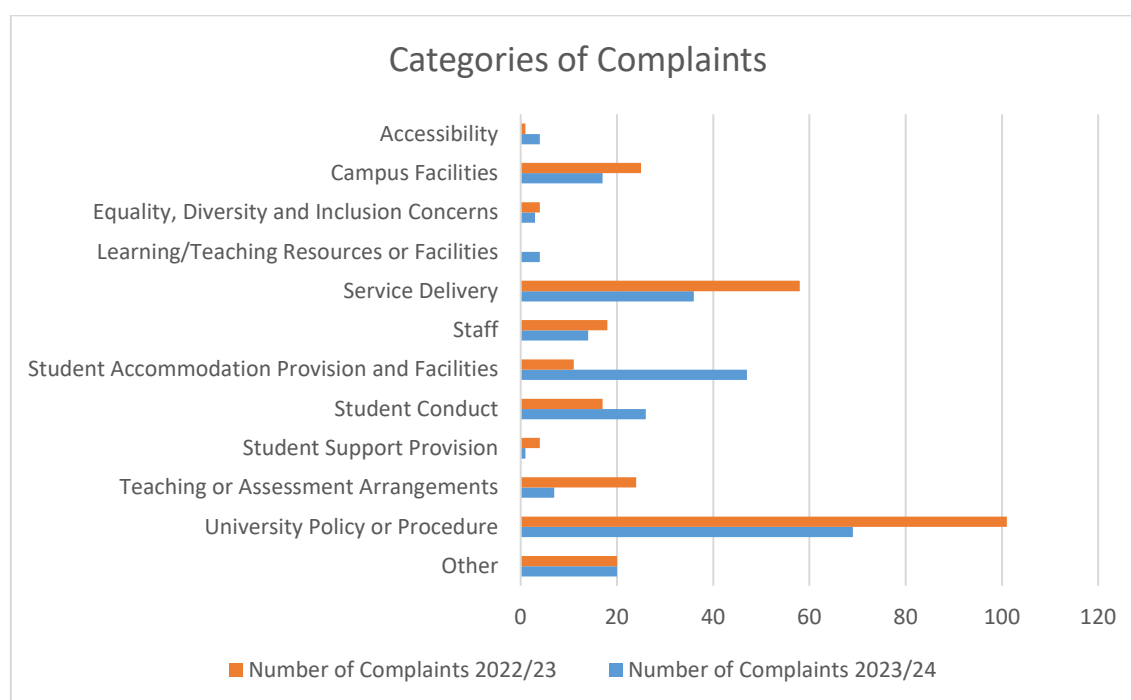
11. Complaints were received at the following points during the 2023/24 academic year:



12. As demonstrated above, the volume of complaints received was relatively steady across the year, aside from a spike in September 2023 which has similarly also been experienced at the beginning of previous academic years.

Categories of Complaints

13. The breakdown of categories to which the complaints received in 2023/24 related, compared to 2022/23, is as follows:



14. It should be noted that student conduct concerns are generally received directly into the Student Discipline Procedure and therefore the numbers of concerns received as complaints do not represent the total number of student conduct concerns in 2023/24.

Complaint Category Trends

15. In terms of the nature of the complaints received:

- Compared to 2022/23, in 2023/24:
 - There were decreases in the number of complaints received in relation to: 'Teaching or Assessment Arrangements'; 'University Policy or Procedure'; 'Campus Facilities'; 'Student Support Provision'; 'Service Delivery'; and 'Staff'.
 - There were increases in the number of complaints received regarding: 'Student Accommodation Provision and Facilities'; 'Student Conduct'; 'Learning/teaching Resources or Facilities'; and 'Accessibility'.
 - Volumes of complaints in respect of 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Concerns' remained relatively consistent.
 - In terms of volume changes, 'Student Accommodation Provision and Facilities' experienced the largest increase while 'University Policy or Procedure' experienced the largest decrease.
- In respect of 'Teaching or Assessment Arrangements', numbers of complaints continued to follow the downward trajectory that was seen in 2022/23. In 2023/24, 3% of the total number of complaints received related to 'Teaching or Assessment Arrangements', compared to 8% in 2022/23 and 27% in 2021/22.

- The number of complaints received regarding 'Student Accommodation Provision and Facilities' increased three-fold in 2023/24 compared to the previous year, from 11 to 47. This increase somewhat reverses the 50% reduction in numbers that was observed in 2022/23 compared to 2021/22.
- In 2023/2024 there was a 31% reduction in the number of complaints received in relation to 'University Policy or Procedure' compared to 2022/2023. This represents a notable change in trajectory in that in 2022/23, numbers of complaints in this category increased three-fold compared to 2021/22. 28% of all complaints received in 2023/24 related to this category. It remains the category with the highest volume of complaints, but the volume proportion overall was reduced from 36% in 2022/2023.
- Numbers of complaints regarding 'Campus Facilities' decreased to 7% in 2023/24 compared to the previous year of 8.9%.
- In 2023/24, complaints received regarding 'Service Delivery' accounted for 15% of all complaints, a reduction from 20% in 2022/23. The complaints related to a wide range of matters in line with the diverse range of university activity and service provision.

Complaint Responses

16. The University aims to resolve Stage One complaints within five working days, and Stage Two complaints within 20 working days in line with the Complaints Handling Procedure.
17. In addition, the University is proactive in seeking to resolve complaints, in keeping with [SPSO Good practice guidance](#).
18. The increases in the complexity of complaints that is referenced in the section on 'Complaints Received', sets out one area of context in which the University's complaints handling took place in 2023/24. It was noted in the 2022/23 report that the University had recognised the increases being experienced in complaint volume and complexity levels and had made significant internal investment to bring capacity for complaints handling in line with the emerging levels. A dedicated Student Conduct and Casework function has been established as part of the Academic Registry department, however a number of staff recruitment/appointment challenges have been and continue to be experienced, creating further context in respect of complaint response timelines. Modest improvements in handling timelines have been achieved compared to 2022/23, however the University maintains its commitment to continuing improvement within its overall focus on effective complaints handling.
19. Complaint response timelines in 2023/24, based on complaints that have been fully concluded, were as follows:
 - 68 (46%) complaints responded to in full at Stage 1 were closed in full within 5 working days. The average time taken to respond was 16 working days.
 - 4 (33%) complaints responded to in full at Stage 2 were closed within 20 working days. The average time taken to respond was 99 working days.
 - 1 complaint that was escalated was responded to in full was closed within 20 working days.

20. Where a complaint was not fully responded to within the specified timeline, the University sought to ensure that complainants were kept up to date with the progress of their complaint and that communication remained open with the complainant.

Complaint Outcomes

21. There are four complaint outcome categories available: resolved, upheld, partially upheld, not upheld.
22. Complaints where the outcome is that the complaint is 'upheld' or 'partially upheld' are those where the University identified that something had gone wrong. Complaints where the outcome was 'not upheld' may remain helpful to inform service improvement, and recommendations are sometimes still made although a complaint has not been upheld.
23. Some complaints do not reach an outcome for reasons such as the complaint being withdrawn or it not being possible for the University to conclude the complaint due to the complainant not engaging with the process. Where this is the case, the final position of the complaint is recorded accordingly.
24. Stage 1, or frontline complaints, are addressed whenever possible as close to the source of the matter complained about. 60% of complaints received at Stage 1 in 2023/24 were successfully resolved in line with our complaints handling objectives. Outcomes/positions of the **175** complaints handled at Stage 1 in 2023/24 were as follows:

Outcome	Number of Stage 1 Complaints
Resolved	105
Upheld	10
Partially Upheld	8
Not Upheld	24
Current/Final Position	Number of Stage 1 Complaints
Withdrawn by complainant	8
Yet to be fully concluded	4
Referred to another procedure	12
Closed – insufficient engagement from complainant	4

25. Stage 2 complaints are often complex in nature and require careful investigation. Outcomes/positions of the **19** complaints handled at Stage 2 in 2023/24 were as follows:

Outcome	Number of Stage 2 Complaints
Resolved	1
Upheld	1
Partially Upheld	2
Not Upheld	8
Current/Final Position	Number of Stage 2 Complaints
Withdrawn by complainant	0
Yet to be fully concluded	5
Submitted out with timeline	2

26. Some complaints that are received at Stage 1 go on to be considered under Stage 2 of the Complaint Handling Procedure where the complaint has not been resolved for the complainant, or where the complainant was not satisfied by the outcome at Stage 1. Of the **11** complaints in 2023-24 which were escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2:

Outcome	Number of Escalated Complaints
Upheld	0
Partially Upheld	0
Not Upheld	1
Current/Final Position	Number of Escalated Complaints
Closed – insufficient engagement from complainant	5
Yet to be fully concluded	3
Withdrawn by complainant	2

Action and Learning Following Complaints

27. As part of the complaints process, relevant University teams are expected to routinely reflect on the outcomes of complaints and consider any lessons that can be learnt. Where investigations identify areas of practice that could be improved or enhanced, recommendations are made within the complaint response and progressed by the relevant faculty or directorate.
28. The University considers each complaint and concern received to be an opportunity to learn and facilitate continuous enhancement. Complaint trends are considered and acted upon as appropriate, including through the institutional quality and governance arrangements.

29. In concluding some complaints, specific recommendations for change or enhancement may be made. The recommendations made following outcomes from complaints investigated at Stage 2 during 2023/24 are set out in the table below. Further recommendations may be made when the complaints that are yet to be fully concluded are closed.

	Recommendation
1	Accommodation Services to identify returning students living in accommodation over the summer and contact students earlier.
2	Accommodation Services will look at and then promote allocations policy on website and collaborate with Admissions ensuring consistent information is provided to applicants.
3	Divisions in the Faculty of Natural Sciences will ensure all programme structures are clearly outlined.
4	Accommodation Services to receive refresher training in handling of complaints.

March 2025