



Complaints Handling Performance Report

2024/25

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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 2024/25 academic year (1 August 2024- 31 July 2025) 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 can 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 2024/25 academic year the University received a total of 182 complaints. This number represents a reduction of approximately 26% compared to 2023/24 but nonetheless a continuation of the significantly higher volumes of complaints that have been received over the previous five years (in academic year 2020/21, the number of complaints received was 93).
7. Table 1 sets out the total numbers of complaints received in the past five academic years.

Table 1: Total numbers of complaints received in the past five academic years

Academic Year	Total Number of Complaints Received
2024/25	182
2023/24	248
2022/23	283
2021/22	198
2020/21	93

8. The reduction in total volume of complaints in 2024/25 is in part attributable to the introduction of a new triage approach within the overall complaints handling process. The revised approach seeks to enable the earliest possible identification of matters that constitute a complaint and should be considered under the University's Complaint Handling Procedure and those that should be referred to a different procedure or that do not constitute a complaint. This approach was implemented in 2024/25 with the aim of optimising efficiency and ensuring where appropriate, matters are directed to the most suitable University process from the point of initial receipt. The complexity of many matters raised with the University mean that some originally recorded as a complaint may subsequently go on to be referred to another procedure. Data on this type of referral is included within Table 2 which sets out a breakdown of the complaints received, and a comparison with the same data from the last academic year (2023/24).

9. **Table 2: Breakdown of complaints received**

	2023/24	2024/25
Total number of complaints	248	182
Received as a Stage 1 complaint	175 (70.6%)	127 (69.8%)
Escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2 complaint	11 (4.4%)	7 (3.8%)
Received as a Stage 2 complaint	19 (7.7%)	33 (18.1%)
Referred to another University Procedure	25 (10.0%)	7 (3.8%)
Not a valid complaint	18 (7.3%)	8 (4.5%)

10. Key to note in Table 2 are: the significant proportionate increase in the numbers of complaints received as a Stage 2 complaint; and the proportionate decrease in the numbers of complaints that were initially handled as a complaint but were subsequently referred to another University procedure. Both data indicate the continuing increase in the complexity of complaints being received by the University and the matters upon which they are based. Despite the reduction in the total volume of complaints, these continuing increases in complexity require correspondingly increasing volumes of time, expertise and skill to handle complaints effectively.

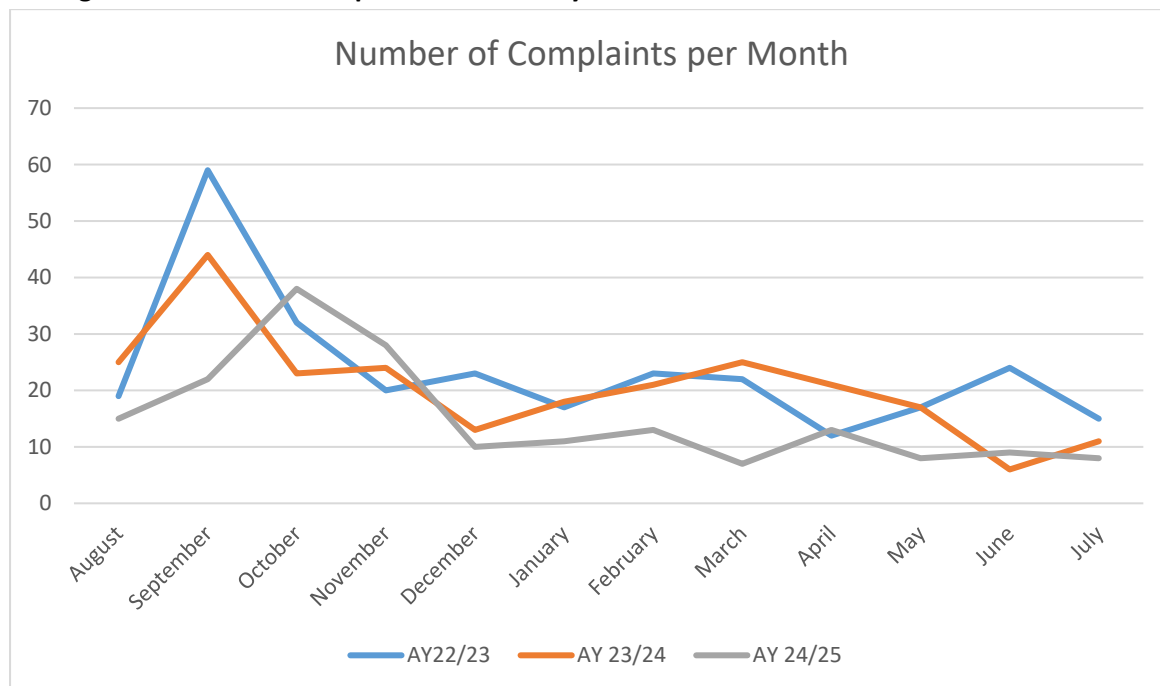
11. Complexity in complaints arises through a very wide range of factors. Some examples of these factors include:

- very large volumes of information and documentation submitted with a complaint
- the content of a complaint including highly personal, sensitive or traumatic matters
- a complainant pursuing and seeking outcomes from multiple University processes in parallel
- a complainant submitting large volumes of further communication and/or information while a complaint consideration is ongoing, sometimes to multiple teams, that therefore requires to be addressed and responded to in addition to the required work on the complaint
- complaints spanning multiple organisations (e.g. placement providers, external organisations)
- legal action being progressed by complainants in addition to a complaint
- complaint outcomes not being accepted and a complainant seeking to remain in ongoing interaction regarding the complaint after the University has concluded its work on it
- unrealistic expectations in terms of the possible outcomes of complaints
- abusive or otherwise inappropriate communications/interactions with staff members.

Timing of Complaints Received

12. In respect of when complaints were received, the flow was relatively steady across the year, aside from a spike in October 2024 which has similarly also been experienced at the beginning of previous academic years.
13. Figure 1 below indicates the distribution of complaints received across 2024/25 and provides a comparison with the previous two academic years.

Figure 1: Volume of complaints received by month



Categories of Complainants

14. Table 3 provides a breakdown of the categories of people who submitted complaints in 2024/25.

Table 3: Breakdown of complainant categories

Category of Complainant	Number of Complaints	Proportion of Total Complaints	Proportion Variance from 2023/24
Applicant	23	12.6%	+0.9%
Undergraduate Student	73	40.1%	+11.1%
Postgraduate Taught Student	33	18.1%	-2.5%
Postgraduate Research Student	10	5.5%	+2.7%
International Study Centre (ISC) Student	1	0.6%	-0.6%
External Individual (e.g. advocating on behalf of a student)	2	1.2%	+0.8%
Parent/Carer/Guardian of a Student or Applicant	16	8.8%	-0.9%
University Staff Member	0	0%	-2.0%
University Alumni	5	2.7%	+1.5%
Member of the Public	15	8.2%	-10.4%
Unidentified Individuals	4	2.2%	-0.6%
Total	182	100%	

15. In 2024/25, the total number of complaints received from students (excluding ISC students) during 2024/25 was 116, representing approximately 64% of all complaints, and a decrease of approximately 10.7% compared to 2023/24 when 130 complaints were received from students (approximately 52% of all the 2023/24 complaints). In the same period, the University's student population decreased by 3.6%. The proportion of University students who submitted a complaint continued to represent less than 1% of the student body.

Categories of Complaints and Category Trends

16. The complaints received by the University related to a range of different matters and for the purposes of this report, have been collated by category based on these matters. Table 4 below provides a breakdown of complaints by category in 2024/25, and a comparison in the volumes and proportions of complaints in each category received in the previous two academic years.

Table 4: Categories of complaint

Category	No. 22/23	% 22/23	No. 23/24	% 23/24	No. 24/25	% 24/25
Accessibility	1	0.4	4	1.6	1	0.6
Campus Facilities	25	8.8	17	6.9	20	11.0
Equality Diversity and Inclusion Concerns	4	1.4	3	1.2	1	0.6
Learning / Teaching Resources or Facilities	0	0	4	1.6	9	4.9
Service Delivery	58	20.5	36	14.6	25	13.7
Staff	18	6.3	14	5.6	18	9.9
Student Accommodation Provision and Facilities	11	3.9	47	18.9	32	17.6
Student Conduct	17	6.0	26	10.5	10	5.5
Student Support Provision	4	1.4	1	0.4	2	1.1
Teaching or Assessment Arrangements	24	8.5	7	2.8	19	10.4
University Policy or Procedure	101	35.7	69	27.8	41	22.5
Other	20	7.1	20	8.1	4	2.2

17. 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 raised or handled in 2024/25.

Complaint Responses

18. 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.

19. In addition, the University is proactive in seeking to resolve complaints, in keeping with [SPSO Good practice guidance](#).

20. At the time of this report being prepared, 94.5% of Stage 1 and 70.0% of Stage 2 complaints received in 2024/25 have been fully concluded (either through response or resolution).
21. Complaint response timelines, based on complaints that have been fully concluded, were as follows:
- 54 (45.0%) complaints responded to in full at Stage 1 were closed in full within 5 working days. The average time taken to respond was 16.9 working days.
 - 3 (10.7%) complaints responded to in full at Stage 2 were closed within 20 working days. The average time taken to respond was 138.6 working days.
22. Where a complaint was not fully concluded 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 throughout.

Complaint Outcomes

23. There are four complaint outcome categories available: resolved, upheld, partially upheld, not upheld.
24. Complaints where the outcome is that the complaint is ‘upheld’ or ‘partially upheld’ are those where the University identified that something had gone wrong or could have been better. 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.
25. 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.
26. Stage 1, or frontline complaints, are resolved whenever possible as close to the source of the matter complained about as possible. Table 5 below sets out the outcomes/positions of the **127** complaints handled at Stage 1 in 2024/25.

Table 5: Outcomes/positions of Stage 1 complaints

Outcome	Number of Stage 1 Complaints
Resolved	43
Upheld	15
Partially Upheld	10
Not Upheld	34
Current/Final Position	Number of Stage 1 Complaints
Withdrawn by complainant	3
Yet to be fully concluded	7
Closed - Unacceptable Behaviours Policy invoked	1
Closed – insufficient engagement from complainant	14

27. Stage 2 complaints are generally complex in nature and require careful investigation. Table 6 below sets out the outcomes/positions of the **33** complaints handled at Stage 2 in 2024/25.

Table 6: Outcomes/positions of Stage 2 complaints

Outcome	Number of Stage 2 Complaints
Resolved	0
Upheld	3
Partially Upheld	6
Not Upheld	10
Current/Final Position	Number of Stage 2 Complaints
Withdrawn by complainant	1
Yet to be fully concluded	10
Closed – insufficient engagement from complainant	3

28. Some complaints that are received at Stage 1 go on to be considered under Stage 2 of the Complaint Handling Procedure. This is generally where the complaint has not been resolved for the complainant, or where the complainant is not satisfied by the outcome at Stage 1. Table 7 below sets out the outcomes/positions of the **7** complaints in 2024/25 which were escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2:

Table 7: Outcomes/positions of escalated complaints

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

Action and Learning Following Complaints

29. 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.
30. 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.
31. In concluding some complaints, specific recommendations for change or enhancement may be made. To date in respect of 2024/25 complaints, 14 recommendations have been made following outcomes from complaints investigated at Stage 2 during 2024/25. Further recommendations may be made when the complaints that are yet to be fully concluded are closed. The recommendations made relate to:

- Clarity of communications with students regarding property work to accommodation buildings
- Developments to the Code of Practice: Research Degrees in respect of progress review meetings
- Clarity of communications with students regarding finance payments, and expectations in respect of debt repayment ahead of graduation
- The operation of student placements and engagements with placement providers
- Handling of complaints regarding student placements
- Clarity of communications with students regarding assessment expectations
- Enhancement to support arrangements and communications with students in relation to examination periods

32. In addition, a range of change and development was progressed directly based on the resolution and conclusion of complaints. Examples include:

- Review of the storage of swimming pool entry/exit assistance handles when not in use.
- University website updated with additional photographs of one type of accommodation offering to ensure all specific room types are represented
- Allergen posters in one of the eateries on campus moved to a more visible location
- Review of processes and improved communications when repairs are required and reparatory work cannot be carried out immediately.