



ANNUAL REPORT TO COURT ON THE COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE FOR SESSION 2020/21

Introduction

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) requires Scottish Universities to report on a variety of Key Performance Indicators, which have been considered in detail by the Scottish Universities' Complaints Forum and also by the Universities' Scotland Secretaries' Group. The SPSO recently revised the Model Complaints Handling Procedure and the University revised its Complaints Handling Procedure in turn, for implementation on 1 April 2021. Key changes relate to: resolution as alternative to upholding a complaint; improvements to supporting complainants; considering complaints made via social media; agreeing a complaint (stage 2) and; changes to recording, reporting and learning.

The University's Complaints Handling Procedure ("CHP") emphasises the quick resolution of complaints, at the point nearest to wherever they arise within the University. This is in preference to lengthy investigations. However, some complaints may either commence at the investigation stage (if complex, time-consuming, or special categories of) or alternatively may proceed to stage 2 investigation after stage 1 frontline response (for example, if the complainant is still dissatisfied; in effect as an internal appeal).

Note: in this report where figures less than 5 occur, neither numbers, nor (where the numbers involved are less than 10) percentages, have been included as a matter of policy. This applies where (i) arithmetic distortions in percentages/trends due to low numbers may occur and/or (ii) where there is a risk of identification of any individuals' personal data (and/or special categories of personal data) under data protection legislation.

Key Performance Indicators

Table 1: Number of complaints recorded in the current academic year by quarter (totals received)

Quarter	Number
Quarter 1 (Sept - Nov)	0
Quarter 2 (Dec - Feb)	5
Quarter 3 (Mar - May)	22
Quarter 4 (June - Aug)	8
Overall Total	35

Note: for the purposes of this report all complaint outcomes have been counted, including stage 1 frontline outcomes where the complaint was then escalated to stage 2 investigation.

Table 2: Total numbers of complaints recorded by academic year

Academic year	Number
2015-16	14
2016-17	30
2017-18	17
2018-19	30
2019-20	16
2020-21	35

Table 3: Frontline or investigation procedure: proportion of total complaints number (and percentage) by year

	Frontline	Investigation
2015-16	7 (50%)	7 (50%)
2016-17	22 (73.33%)	8 (26.67%)
2017-18	8 (47.06%)	9 (52.94%)
2018-19	17 (56.67%)	13 (43.33%)
2019-20	5 (31.25%)	11 (68.75%)
2020-21	23 (65.71%)	12 (34.29%)

Note: the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's view is that universities should address as many complaints as possible at stage 1 frontline response (this is the reason why the above percentages are provided). Frontline response is therefore performed wherever possible; this involves the complaint being addressed at the point in the University nearest to where it arose.

However, some complaints are too complex and/or lengthy to be considered as frontline response ones within the Ombudsman's strict 5 working day target time-limit for this category of complaint. Any breach of this deadline requires to be authorised, recorded and reported on, even if the subject matter of the complaint is too lengthy and/or complex to be completed within that time-limit. Such cases may be dealt with initially as complaint investigations (stage 2), for which a 20-working day target time-limit applies. The University's CHP envisages that a complaint may commence as an investigation, i.e., at stage 2, where appropriate.

Table 4: Percentage (and number) of all frontline response and of all investigations closed within target time-limit (5 and 20 working days respectively): by complaint quarter, for current academic year

	Frontline	Investigation
Quarter 1 (Sept - Nov)	-	-
Quarter 2 (Dec - Feb)	-	-
Quarter 3 (Mar - May)	87.5% (14 of 16)	100% (6 of 6)
Quarter 4 (June - Aug)	100% (6 of 6)	-

Notes: where low numbers are concerned, percentage information is misleading, therefore numbers are included for clarity, please also see the introductory note above regarding redaction.

Complaints arising from members of staff are normally dealt with under the Grievance Procedure operated by People Services and complaints made against students are considered under the Student Conduct policies, so these data are not recorded here.

Table 5: Time taken to resolve complaints: average duration (number of days)

	Frontline (target = 5)	Investigation (target = 20)
Quarter 1 (Sept - Nov)	-	-
Quarter 2 (Dec - Feb)	2	14.25
Quarter 3 (Mar - May)	3.19	16.33
Quarter 4 (June - Aug)	3.83	-

Note: the table above shows the average length of time to deal with complaints in working days by complaint quarter. The targets for dealing with complaints set down by the SPSO are 5 working days for frontline response and 20 working days for complaint investigation cases, which by nature are more complex.

Overall, most complaints were dealt with within the SPSO time limits. The main reasons for rare cases taking longer than the target limit were:

- Staff absence
- Complexity of case

Authorised extensions were granted in most of the above cases; only one case was fractionally out of time, due to a miscommunication.

Please see the introductory note above regarding redaction.

Table 6: Type of complainant for current year

Type of complainant	Number
Student	20
Member of staff	-
Applicant	-
Member of public	15
3rd Party	-
Anonymous	-

Table 7: Outcomes of complaints for current year, closed at each stage

Outcomes	Frontline	Investigation
Upheld fully	-	-
Upheld partially	-	6
Not upheld	-	-
Resolved	20	-
Out of time	-	-
Withdrawn/abandoned	-	-

Note: a complaint may cover several points. Where any of these are upheld or partially upheld, the outcome of the investigation as a whole is recorded as 'partially upheld'. Please see the introductory note above regarding redaction.

Table 8: Category of the complaints made in the current year by frontline or investigation

	Frontline	Investigation
Service provision	-	-
Teaching/assessment	-	-
Pastoral support	-	-
Policy/procedures/admin	6	5
Staff attitude/conduct	-	-
Facilities	-	-
Student accommodation	-	-
Fees/funding	-	-
Special needs	-	-
Against student	-	-
Other	9	-

Note: please see the introductory note above regarding redaction.

Table 9: Schools/Services against which complaints were made in the current year

School/Service	Frontline	Investigation
School of Design & Informatics	-	-
School of Applied Sciences	-	-
School of Business, Law & Social Sciences	5	-
Finance, Infrastructure & Corporate Services	-	-
Student & Academic Services	17	5
External & Corporate Relations	-	-
Governance	-	-
People Services	-	-
Executive Office	-	-
Abertay Learning Enhancement Academy	-	-
Graduate School	-	-
Alumni	-	-
Against student (i.e. rerouted to student disciplinary procedure)	-	-
Other	-	-
Not applicable	-	-

Note: complaints may be made against more than one category (e.g., "other"), so the numbers in the table may not tally with the total numbers of complaints. Please also see the introductory note above regarding redaction.

Lessons learned - You Said We Did 2020-21

We have listened to your suggestions and ideas that have arisen through our complaints process, and we have worked hard to provide new and better services. Find examples below of what we have done as a result of your input.

You Said

You complained about guidance and support across services in connection to the student withdrawal process.

You complained about the Student Disciplinary communication, in connection to understanding decisions, information sharing and data protection.

You complained about programme content related to decolonisation of the curriculum.

You complained about missed counselling appointments and short notice cancellations.

We Did

The University reviewed its procedures for the transmission of information between different services.

We reviewed Student Disciplinary outcome letter templates to ensure they provide fuller explanations of decisions. Additional disciplinary guidance was developed for students to provide clarity on information sharing / data protection policy.

A vision document is currently under development to demonstrate how the decolonising of the curriculum is being progressed, to aid student understanding.

Information is now provided to students prior to commencing sessions advising them of possible reasons for short notice cancellations. Additional information on how to request a 'change of counsellor' has also been included.