

Annual Report on the University's Complaints Procedure 2017-18

1. Background

1.1 Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP)

This is the fifth annual report since the introduction of the current Complaints Procedure, which operates in accordance with the MCHP developed by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). All Scottish higher education institutions are required to manage complaints following a standard approach. Compliance with the MCHP is a condition of the Scottish Funding Council's Funding Agreement.

The Complaints Procedure requires that:

All staff must be aware of the University's Complaints Procedure in order to identify complaints and to respond to them appropriately, and in accordance with the procedure.

The Procedure has 2 Stages:

Stage 1: frontline resolution (issues of complaint that are straightforward and easily resolved, requiring little or no investigation)

Stage 2: investigation (cannot be resolved at Stage 1, or those that are complex or of a serious nature, a more involved investigation process is available, i.e. Stage 2).

Complaints managed via Stage 2 require senior management approval of the University's definitive response).

The SPSO sets the following target timescales for the resolution of complaints:

- Stage 1: within 5 working days
- Stage 2: within 20 working days

1.2 Operation

The report covers the period from 1 August 2017 to 31 July 2018. From 1 August 2018, responsibility for the day-to-day management of the Complaints Procedure moved from the Senate Office to Complaints Resolution Office, within Court Office.

1.3 Senate Assessors for Complaints

During 2017-18, 4 Senate Assessors were in post:

Dr Kathryn Lowe (Senior Senate Assessor for Complaints), College of Arts

Dr Tom Mullen, College of Social Sciences

Dr Peter Sneddon, College of Science and Engineering

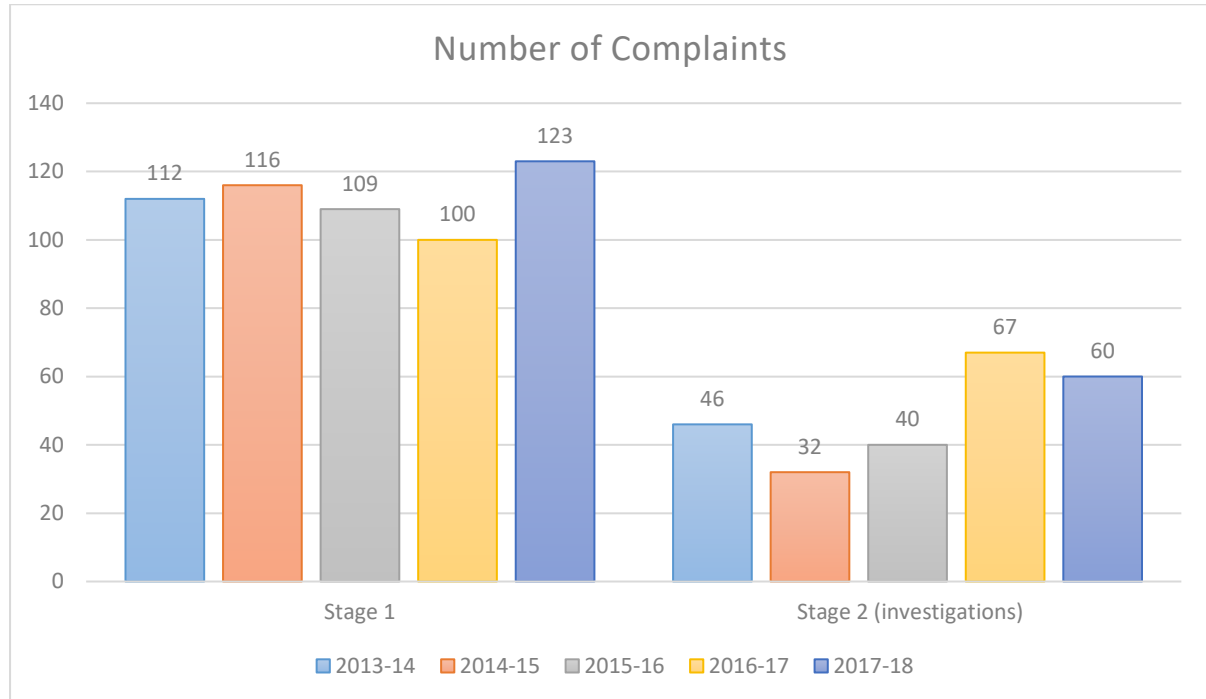
Dr Alastair Gracie, College of Medical Veterinary and Life Sciences

The Senate Assessors work closely with the Complaints Handlers and undertake investigations of complaints which are particularly complex or sensitive, covering multiple areas of the University, a wide range of issues, and/or which identify a risk to the University.

2. Complaints Activity in 2017-18 Analysis

2.1 Complaint Numbers

Statistics on Stage 1 and 2 complaint activity for the year are provided in Appendix 1. These show that the University recorded 123 frontline complaints (Stage 1) and there were 60 full complaint investigations (Stage 2). Comparisons with previous years are illustrated below.



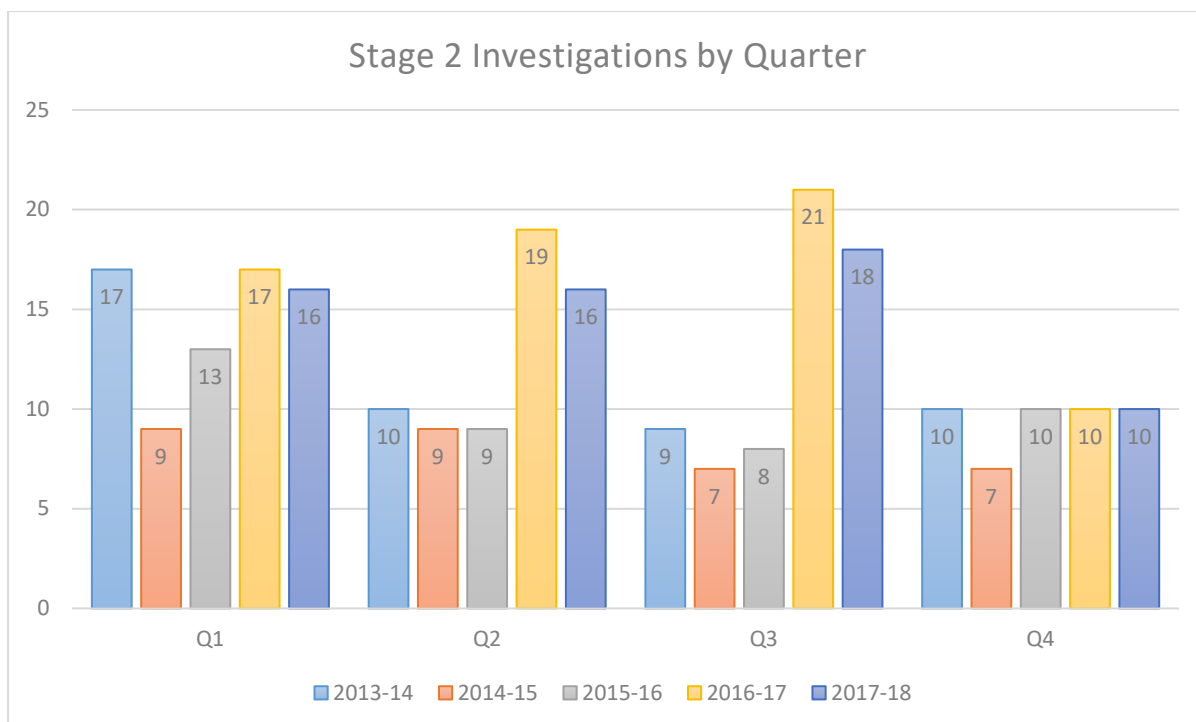
Stage 1

The number of Stage 1 complaints reported has increased to 123 since the last reporting period. The number of Stage 1 complaints submitted has remained reasonably consistent since introduction of the procedure in 2013-14. Schools, Colleges and Service areas are reminded of this requirement, however there is ongoing concern regarding under-reporting of frontline complaints activity.

Twenty-four cases were escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2, which is higher than in previous years.

Stage 2

Sixty cases were eligible for investigation under Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure. The number of investigations at Stage 2 received during the reporting period represents a slight decline from 2016-17 but illustrates a similar pattern in terms of break down by Quarter. The number of investigations remains higher than compared with previous reporting periods.



In addition to the 60 investigations, a further 12 cases were received but did not progress to investigation. Of these:

- 6 were submitted outwith the normal timeframe and mitigating circumstances were not provided or were not accepted as sufficient grounds for the delay in bringing forward the complaint;
- 3 were made by a third-party, without the knowledge/consent of the individual who was the subject of the claimed issues of complaint and no third-party mandate was provided.
- 3 were not taken forward as they did not fall under the scope of the Complaints Procedure.

In terms of outcomes of the investigations that were assessed under Stage 2:

Nine cases were upheld, 14 were partially upheld, 27 were not upheld and in 1 case, it was not possible to make a finding. Five of the 60 cases were withdrawn part way through the process and in one further case the file was closed, prior to conclusion, as the complainant did not engage with the process. Three are yet to be concluded.

Extensions to the prescribed time limit (20 working days) were required in all but one of the concluded cases.

Complex cases are identified as those where:

- A Senate Assessor for Complaints (or equivalent) is appointed as investigator;
- Multiple issues or areas of the University are covered in the complaint;
- Multiple meetings are required in the investigation;
- The complaint presents a potential risk to the University;
- Complaints made by third party representatives.

Under these criteria, 63% (38) of the complaint investigations were identified as complex, compared to 46% the previous year. This includes 11 investigations which involved a Senate

Assessor, compared to 10 in 2016-17. Nine cases were raised by third party representatives compared to five in the previous year.

2.2 Types of Complaints

Table 3 in Appendix 1 provides the number of complaints received in various categories. At Stage 1, there were 44 complaints regarding teaching and supervision (an increase from 15 in 2016-17) and 21 complaints regarding administration.

For the Stage 2 complaints raised, the majority related to concerns over the academic experience – 27 related to teaching and supervision); following this, there were 13 that related to Welfare/Student Support and Advice.

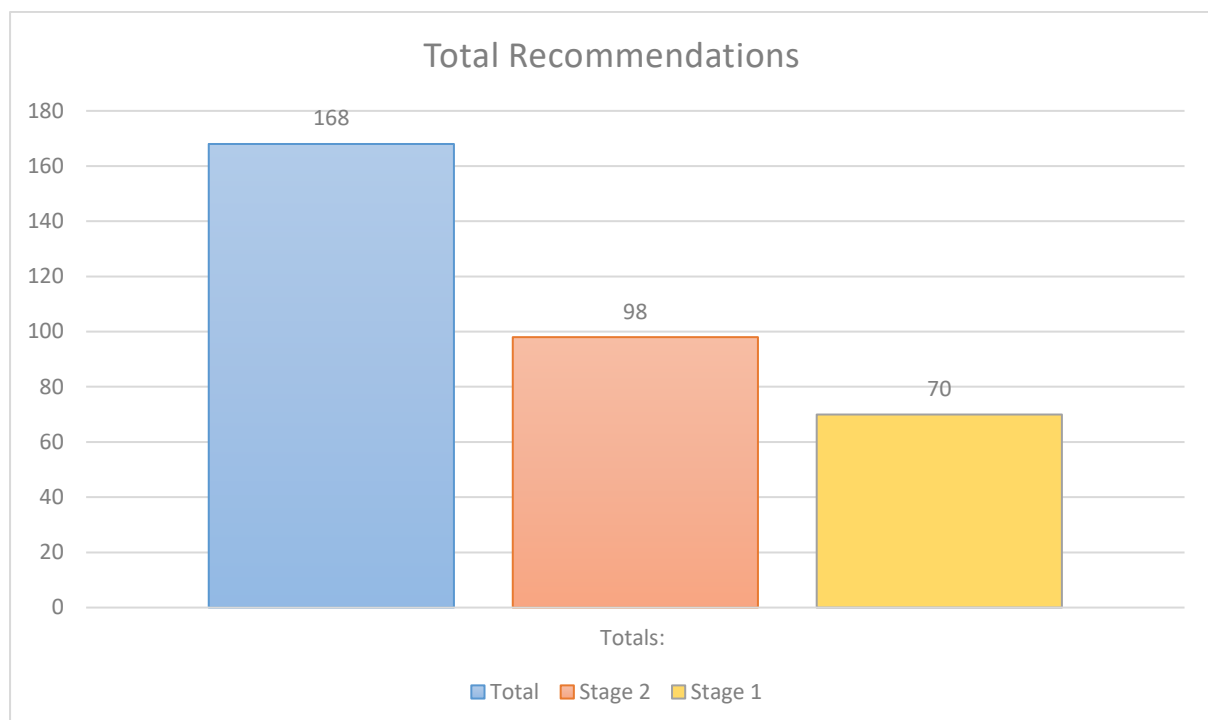
During the reporting period a small number of requests were received, seeking refunds for teaching fees in light of industrial action. Six of these were considered at Stage 2 (and are catergorised as teaching and supervision).

As with the previous years, there was more concentration of complaint activity at Stage 2 in the College of Social Sciences and University Services.

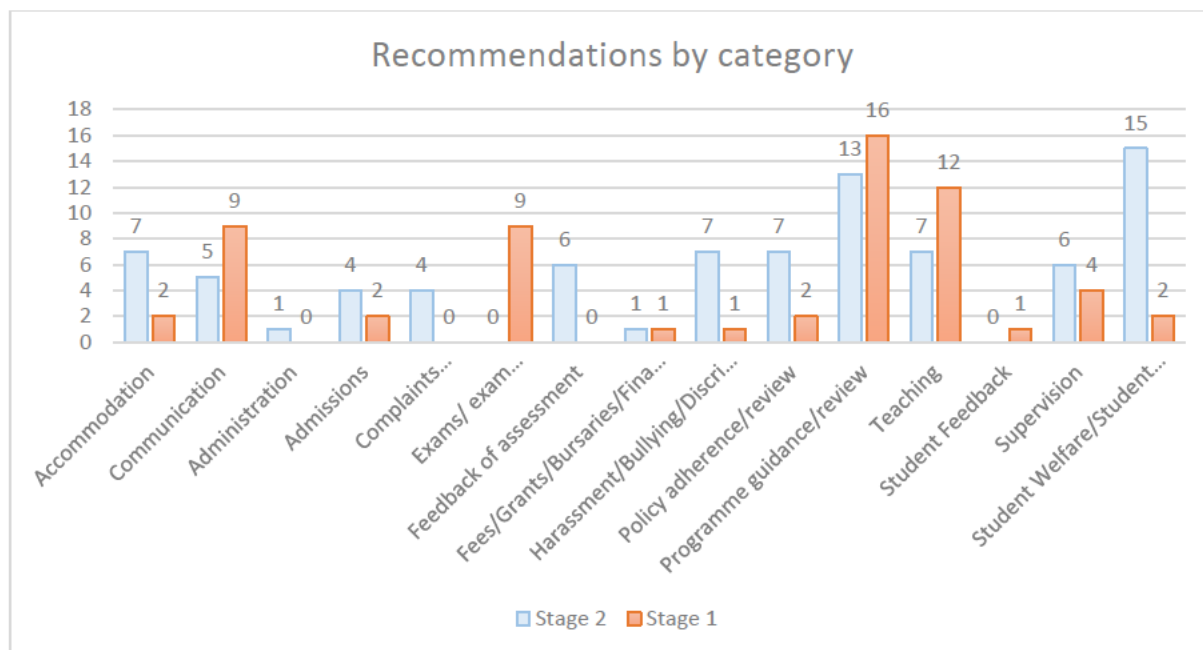
2.3 Process Improvement

Nine of the Stage 2 complaint investigations were fully upheld and 14 were partially upheld. Twenty-seven investigations were not upheld, which is a notable increase compared to the past 3 years. This may reflect on the nature of the cases that were investigated this year.

Many complaint investigations identified improvements, irrespective of the complaint outcome. In total, there were 168 recommendations made during 2017-18 relating to service improvement.



In 2015-16 there were 120 recommendations and in 2016-17 there were 132 recommendations, showing a steady increase in the number of recommendations for service improvements each year. However, this year the increase in recommendations is not in line with an increase in cases which we believe is due to the complexity and nature of the cases in 2017-18, compared to previous years. Often, the most complex cases required a significant number of recommendations in order to resolve the complaint.



The highest number of service improvement recommendations were made under Programme Guidance/Review and Teaching and Student Welfare/Student Support, illustrating that the majority of improvements are directly linked to the student experience. Colleges, Schools or University Services are alerted to the recommendations made by Investigating Officers and are required to report on their progress. The majority of these were in the following areas:

- Programme Guidance and Review
- Teaching
- Student Welfare/Student Support
- Communication
- Policy adherence/review
- Accommodation

A review of service improvement monitoring will be carried out throughout 2018-19 to further identify trends and implementation of recommendations.

Twenty-four Stage 2 investigations made recommendations to remedy the concerns raised. The majority of these were for apologies regarding the upheld aspects of a complaint, however a variety of remedies were applied including;

- academic remedies, such as an extension for an assignment
- a small number of financial remedies were made, such as an offer of a different credit bearing course at no cost to the student.

2.4 Referrals to the SPSO

If a complainant is dissatisfied following the conclusion of stage 2, they have the option to seek a review of the University's management of a complaint from the SPSO (see table 4). In 2017-18 five cases were referred to the SPSO, four of which were after completion of procedures at the University, and one due to the length of time taken to consider a case.

Three of the five cases referred to the SPSO were assessed at an early review stage and it was determined that further investigation not warranted - appropriate level of investigation by the University of Glasgow which indicates that the University's operation of the Complaints Procedure is appropriate and proportionate.

One case has been upheld due to the length of time taken to conclude the investigation and one other case is being investigated by the SPSO, the outcome for which has not yet been issued to the University.

Complaint Statistics for Full Year: August 2017 – July 2018

Table 1: Stage 1 Frontline resolutions

	Arts	MVLS	CoSE	CoSS	US	Cross Colleges & Services	Total
Complaints recorded at Stage 1	19	6	14	26	52	6	123
Complaints resolved at Stage 1	17	5	13	20	39	5	99
Complaints to Stage 2	2	1	1	6	13	1	24

Table 2: Stage 2 Investigations

	Arts	MVLS	CoSE	CoSS	US	Cross Colleges & Services	Total
Complaint investigations	4	6	6	18	17	9	60
Complaints upheld	0	2	0	5	2	0	9
Complaints partially upheld	0	3	1	7	2	1	14
Complaints not upheld	1	1	5	5	9	6	27
Complaints withdrawn	2	0	0	1	1	1	5
No finding made	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
File closed	0	0	0	0		1	2
Complaints pending	1	0	0	0	2	0	3
Including multiple complainants	0	1	0	5	0	0	5

Table 3: Categories for complaints

Complaint Category (complaints may cover multiple categories)	Stage 1	Stage 2
Residential Accommodation	10	8
Administration	21	7
Admissions	12	2
Fees/Grants/Bursaries/Finance	14	3
Harassment/Bullying/Discrimination	0	6
Teaching and Supervision	44	27
Welfare/Student Support and Advice	7	13
Teaching infrastructure (library, facilities)	7	0
Non-teaching infrastructure (clubs, campus)	3	0
Other	18	1

Table 4: Referrals to SPSO

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Cases referred to SPSO by complainant	7	6	5	8	5
SPSO Response					
<i>Not Progressing Complaint</i>					
▪ Internal procedures not completed					
▪ Not in SPSO scope	2	1		1	
▪ Out of time				1	
▪ Action already taken		3			
▪ Further investigation not warranted - appropriate level of investigation by the University of Glasgow.		1	3	3	3
<i>Decision Letter following Full Assessment:</i>					
▪ All elements of complaint upheld	1				1
▪ Some elements of complaint upheld			1	1	
▪ Complaint not upheld	4	1	1	2	
▪ Pending					1