

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW
Annual Report on the University's Complaints Procedure
2018-19

1. Summary

In accordance with the Complaints Procedure this annual report will be presented to the Senate, University Court and Senior Management Group.

1.1 Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP)

This is the sixth 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 procedure covers complaints from students and other service users of the University. It does not cover staff grievances or student issues covered by other processes such as academic appeals or student conduct.

1.2 Complaints Handling 2018-19

The report covers the period from 1 August 2018 to 31 July 2019.

Overall, we have seen a similar trend in terms of the types of cases handled through the Complaints Procedure. At Stage 1, a similar number of cases have been recorded as in previous years. There have been fewer cases investigated at Stage 2 of the procedure than in the previous two years (47 compared to 60 in 2017-18 and 67 in 2016-17).

As with the previous years, there was more concentration of complaint activity at both Stage 1 and Stage 2 in the College of Social Sciences and University Services.

The highest number of service improvement recommendations were made under the categories of Student Support/Wellbeing, Teaching/Supervision and Assessment, illustrating that, as in previous years, most improvements are directly related to the student experience.

All complaints from 2018-19 referred to SPSO for a decision, on which decisions have already been reached, have been reviewed at early assessment stage and have not been progressed. This suggests that the University's operation of the CHP (at Stage 2) is robust and fit for purpose.

Overall, 41% of Stage 1 cases were responded to within 5 working days, this was inevitably lowest during quarter 3 (Feb – Apr). 12% of Stage 2 cases were concluded in 20 working days. Of those cases that exceeded this, % were considered complex

1.3 Future Developments

Monitoring service improvements is one of the most valuable aspects from the Complaints Handling Procedure. Following a review of how service improvements are monitored, it is anticipated that the new casework management system (IVANTI) will improve capacity to monitor complaint outcomes and learning from complaints and enhance the mechanisms for identifying trends and monitoring the implementation of recommendations over the next session.

The SPSO are updating the Model Complaints Handling Procedure with a view to implementation of the revised procedure during 2019-20.

1.4 Complaints Procedure

In line with SPSO requirements, 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

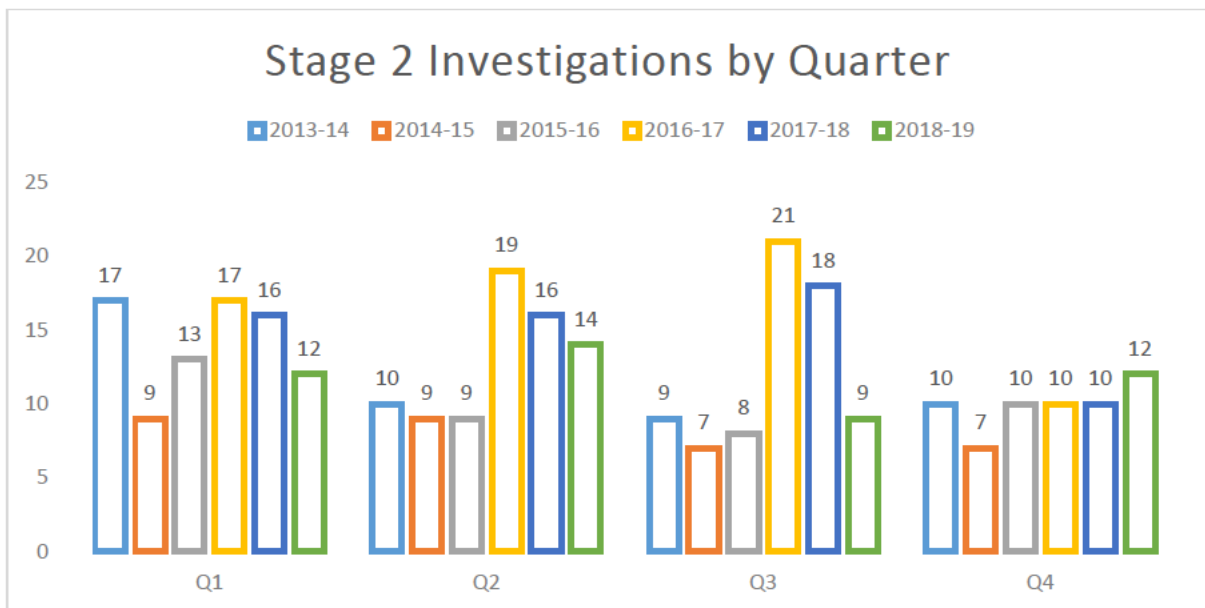
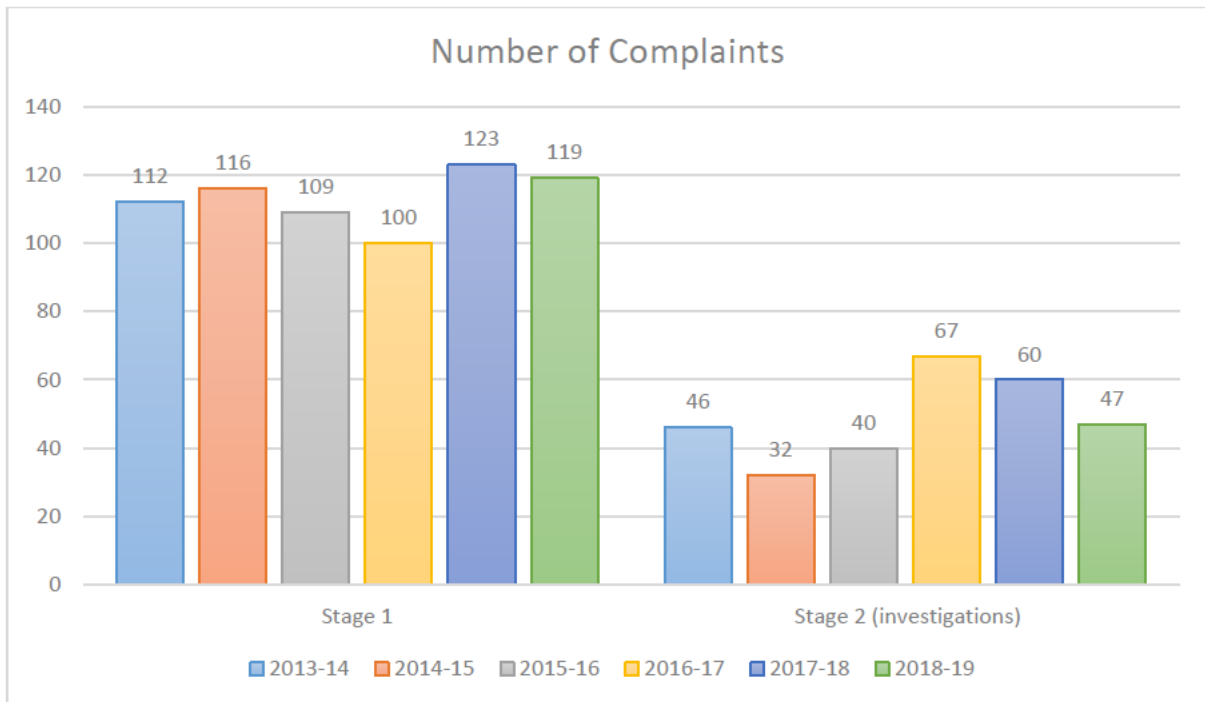
Not all investigations will be able to meet this deadline; for example, some complaints are so complex that they will require careful consideration and detailed investigation beyond the 20 working days timeline. Where there are clear and justifiable reasons for extending the timescale the Deputy Secretary will exercise judgement and will set time limits on any extended investigation.

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.

Complaints handling performance is reported on annually in line with statutory requirements. This includes performance statistics showing the volume and type of complaints and key performance details, for example on the time taken and the stage at which complaints were resolved.

2. Summary Analysis

2.1 Complaint Numbers



Further details on the breakdown of complaint activity are provided in Appendix 1.

1 in Appendix 1 illustrates that the University recorded 119 complaints responded to at frontline (Stage 1) and 47 complaints were eligible for investigation under Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure (table 2).

The number of Stage 1 complaints reported 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.

The number of investigations at Stage 2 received during the reporting period represents a decline from 2017-18. The pattern in terms of break down by Quarter, is similar to previous years, except in Quarter 3 (February – April), in which the number of Stage 2 complaint investigations fell by half compare to 2017-18, having almost tripled in 2016-17 and having remained at a similar level in 2017-18.

Completion rates (table 5a) show that 37% of Stage 1 cases were responded to within 5 working days and a further 33% within 10 working days. Of the 119 cases responded to at Stage 1 only 15 were escalated to Stage 2 (table 1), which indicates that generally complaints are concluded quickly and effectively at Stage 1. In the remaining 32 Stage 2 cases, the issues raised were complex and it was determined that the matter should be immediately referred for consideration as a Stage 2 investigation.

Table 5b provides the information for completion rates for Stage 2 cases. Three Stage 2 complaints were completed within 20 working days, extensions to the prescribed time limit were required in all other cases. The reasons why extensions have been required include the complexity of the case, delays due to the complainant, the unpredictability of complaints workflow and competing priorities or availability of the Investigating Officer or members of staff who are needed to contribute to the investigation. The timescales prescribed by the SPSO continue to be a concern as our experience of complaint investigation work identifies many practical reasons why the 20-day deadline is challenging.

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the outcomes of Stage 2 cases. Four of the 47 Stage 2 cases were upheld, 11 were partially upheld, 26 were not upheld and in one case, it was not possible to make a finding. Three cases at Stage 2 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. Two cases are yet to be concluded.

Table 3 records the cases that were not progressed through the Complaints Procedure: 30 cases in total; seven of these cases were submitted outwith the normal six-month timeframe for raising a complaint, and mitigating circumstances were not provided or were not accepted as sufficient grounds for the delay; 18 cases were referred to another procedure and a further five cases were not matters that could be dealt with through our Complaints Handling Procedure.

2.2 Types of Complaints (see table 4)

Table 4 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.

In many of the Stage 2 cases, multiple issues were raised across a range of categories. Of the Stage 2 complaints raised in 2018-19, the majority related to concerns about the

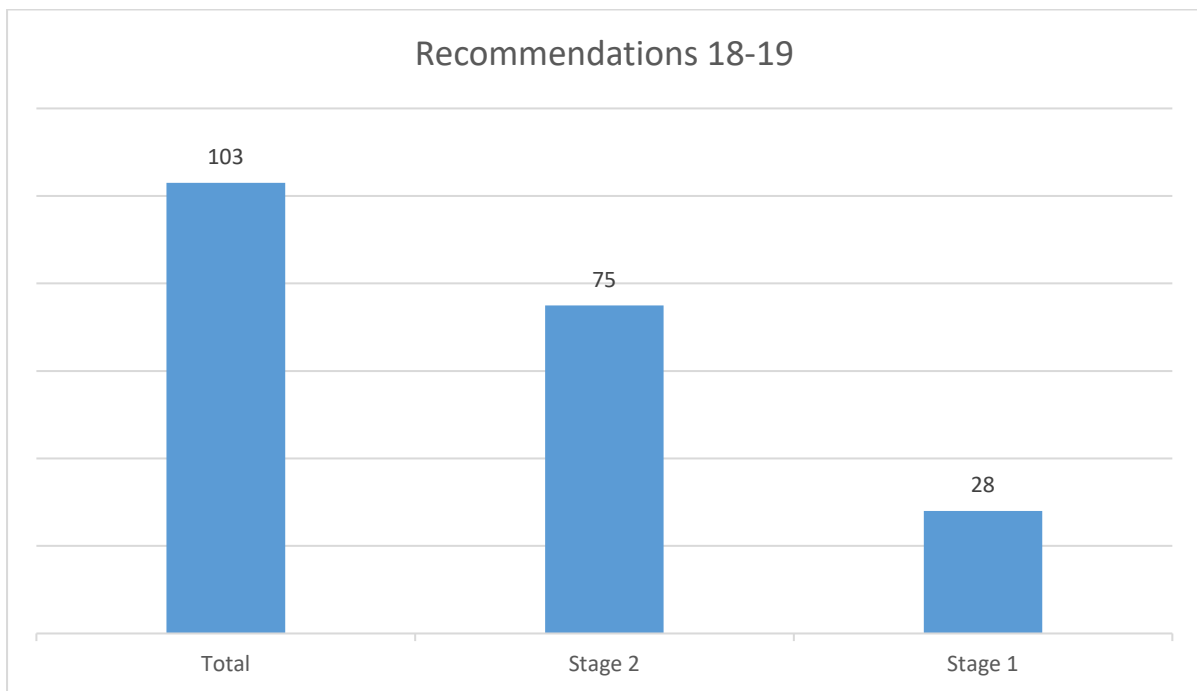
academic experience – 27 related to teaching and supervision; following this, there were 13 that related to Welfare/Student Support and Advice.

Of the 15 Stage 2 cases where the complaint, or elements of the complaint were upheld, the majority related to ‘teaching and supervision’, ‘administrative procedures’, ‘student support and wellbeing’ and ‘communication’.

2.3 Process Improvement

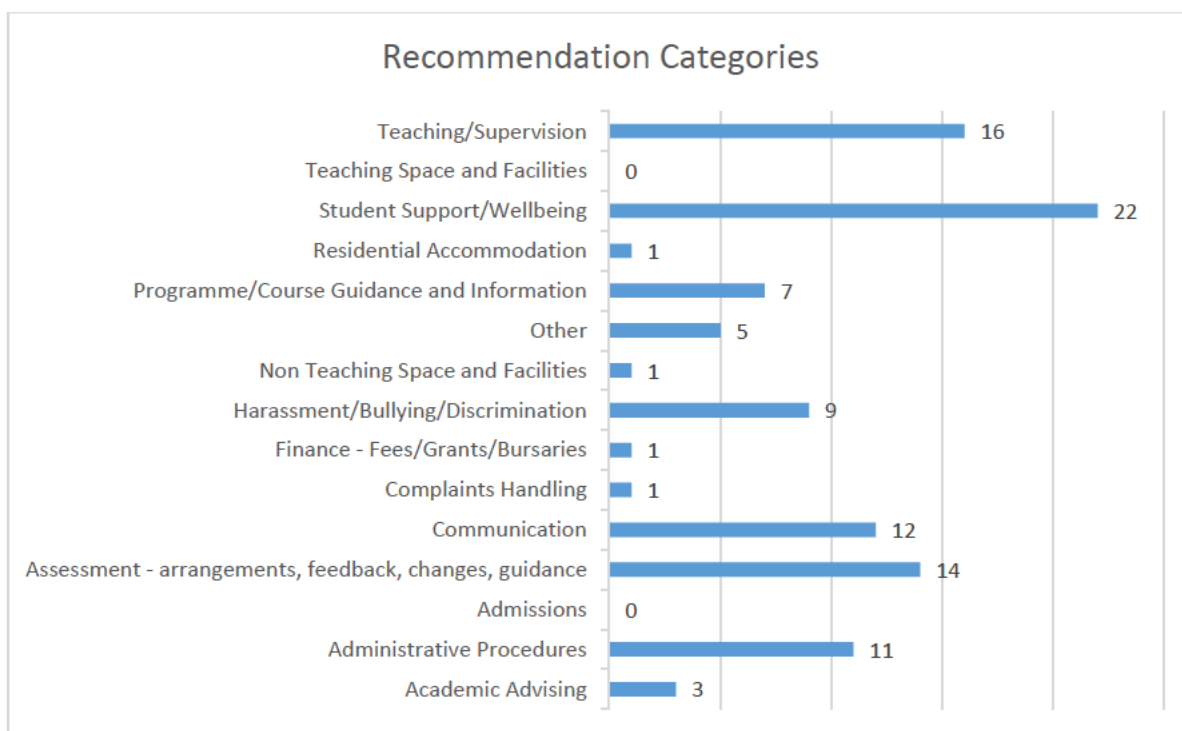
In addition to resolution of individual complaints, it is important that the University learns from each complaint, in order to minimise repeat complaints and to improve the services provided to our students and stakeholders.

Many complaint investigations identified improvements, irrespective of the complaint outcome. In total, there were 103 recommendations made during 2018-19 relating to service improvement. Often, the most complex cases required a significant number of recommendations in order to resolve the complaint.



In some cases, recommendations are made to remedy or resolve the concerns of the individuals involved in a complaint, however often recommendations aim to make service level improvements for all students and staff. Recommendations are shared with the relevant staff in Colleges, Schools or University Services, so that the information from complaints can be used to inform any consideration of opportunities for improvements or developments Staff in Colleges, Schools or University Services are required to report on progress made.

Examples of improvements made following Stage 2 recommendations include:



Assessment – arrangements, feedback, changes, guidance

- Clarification of examination procedure was added to a School's viva invitation letters.
- A College established a working group to review their examination and reporting procedures, and a new template report form was drafted containing more specific instructions.
- A School added more information about ethics approval to their training slides.

Student Support / Wellbeing

- Recommendations from complaints have informed a review of student support services.
- A School provided regular supporting meetings for a student.

Non- teaching space and facilities

- Organisational and physical changes were made to a building space to allow staff to conduct private conversations with students about sensitive matters.

2.4 Referrals to the SPSO (see table 6)

Seven of the ten 2018-19 complaints referred to the SPSO were assessed at their early review stage and were determined either the complaint was premature, out of time, out of the SPSO's jurisdiction, or there had been an appropriate level of investigation by the University of Glasgow. The remaining three cases from 2018-19 are currently being considered by the SPSO, to determine whether they will investigate.

During 2018-19, the SPSO also reached one further decision on a case from 2017-18, the case was upheld. Recommendations made by the SPSO in relation to their findings have been acted on by the University.

There are two cases from 2017-18 which are being investigated by the SPSO and their decision is pending. There are also three further cases being considered by the SPSO, to determine whether they will be investigated.

Complaint Statistics for Full Year: August 2018 – July 2019

Table 1: Stage 1 Frontline resolutions

	Arts	MVLS	CoSE	CoSS	US	Cross Colleges & Services	Total
Complaints recorded at Stage 1	13	7	8	23	55	13	119
Complaints resolved at Stage 1	11	6	8	15	52	12	104
Complaints to Stage 2	2	1	0	8	3	1	15

Table 2: Stage 2 Investigations

	Arts	MVLS	CoSE	CoSS	US	Cross Colleges & Services	Total
Complaint investigations	3	3	6	17	12	6	47
Complaints upheld				3		1	4
Complaints partially upheld	2	1	1	4	1	2	11
Complaints not upheld	1	2	3	9	9	2	26
No finding made			1				1
Complainant opted to remove case from Complaints Procedure prior to conclusion			1		1	1	3
Complaints pending				1	1		2
Including multiple complainants				2			2

Table 3: Closed at initial assessment

Categories	Number of cases
Out of time	7
Referred to another procedure	18
Not able to investigate under the Complaints Procedure	5
Total	30

Table 4: Categories for complaints

Complaint Category (complaints may cover multiple categories)	Stage 1	Stage 2
Academic Advising	0	5
Administrative Procedures	24	11
Admissions	10	0
Assessment - arrangements, feedback, changes, guidance	19	12
Communication	4	8
Complaints Handling	0	3
Finance - Fees/Grants/Bursaries/Finance	21	0
Harassment/Bullying/Discrimination	9	9
Non-Teaching Space and Facilities	4	0
Programme/Course Guidance and Information	7	10
Residential Accommodation	5	0
Student Support/Wellbeing	22	11
Teaching Space and Facilities	8	2
Teaching and Supervision	37	16
Other	13	1

Table 5a: Stage 1: Performance indicators

	Arts	MVLS	CoSE	CoSS	US	Cross Colleges / Services	Total
Within 5 days	8		1	2	31	2	44
Within 10 days	2	5	5	5	15	7	39
Longer than 10 days	3	2	2	16	9	4	36

Table 5b: Stage 2: Performance indicators

	Arts	MVLS	CoSE	CoSS	US	Cross Colleges / Services	Total
Complaint investigations	3	3	6	17	12	6	47
Investigations completed within 20 working days		1			2		3
Complaint investigations completed beyond 20 working days	3	2	5	17	7	5	39

Complaint investigations pending beyond 20 working days					2		2
Closed or withdrawn			1		1	1	3

Table 6: Referrals to Scottish Public Service Ombudsman

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Cases referred to SPSO by complainant	7	6	5	8	13	10
SPSO Response						
<i>Not Progressing Complaint</i>						
▪ Premature (internal procedures not completed)						1
▪ Out of jurisdiction	2	1		1		3
▪ Out of time				1	2	1
▪ Not investigated further		4	3	3	4	2
<i>Decision Letter following Full Assessment:</i>						
▪ All elements of complaint upheld	1				2	
▪ Some elements of complaint upheld			1	1	1	
▪ Complaint not upheld	4	1	1	2		
▪ Pending					5	3