

**UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW**  
**Complaints Handling Procedure**  
**Annual Report 2022-2023**

**1. Introduction**

This report covers complaints considered through the University’s Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) between 1 August 2022 and 31 July 2023.

The Complaints Handling Procedure considers dissatisfaction about service delivery. It does not cover staff grievances or student issues covered by other processes such as academic appeals or student conduct.

The University’s complaints procedure is based on the Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) for Higher Education issued by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). The Complaints Handling Procedure was updated in 2021, following a refresh of the MCHP.

The SPSO has set four KPIs for complaints handling and these are addressed in the first section of the report which follows.

The CHP involves two internal stages:

Stage 1 (Frontline) to be handled within 5 working days; and Stage 2 (Investigation) to be handled within 20 working days.

Following stages 1 and 2, if a complainant remains dissatisfied, they have the option to take their complaint to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) for consideration.

**2. Key Performance Indicators**

**KPI 1: Total number of complaints received**

The number of complaints received at Stage 1, the number escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2, and the number of complaints received directly at Stage 2. The table also includes the number of issues raised that cannot be handled through the CHP.

	Total	Stage 1	Stage 2 Overall	Escalated to Stage 2	Direct to Stage 2
Incidents received	644				
Request for service and/or information	190				
Referred to another procedure	54				
Complaints which have been submitted but cannot be taken forward through CHP	3				
<b>Taken forward</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>43</b>
Complaints subsequently withdrawn	19	17	2	1	1

## KPI 2: The outcome of complaints at each stage

An overview of the outcome of complaints, by percentage.

	Stage 1	Stage 2 overall	Escalated to S2	Direct to S2
<b>Withdrawn</b>	5.1%	3.3%	5.6%	2.3%
<b>Resolution /Remedy</b>	86.9%	3.3%	0.0%	4.7%
<b>Resolution not accepted</b>	5.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Not upheld</b>	0.0%	37.7%	44.4%	34.9%
<b>Upheld in part</b>	0.3%	26.2%	27.8%	25.6%
<b>Upheld</b>	0.0%	9.8%	5.6%	11.6%
<b>Presumed resolved</b>	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>No finding</b>	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Pending</b>	0.0%	19.7%	16.7%	20.9%

## KPI 3: Complaints at each stage that were closed in full within the set timescales of five and 20 working days.

The number of complaints closed in full at stage 1, stage 2 and after escalation within MCHP timescales as a proportion of all stage 1, stage 2 and escalated complaints.

Stage 1 Timescales	S1 (%)	Stage 2 Timescales	Stage 2 overall (%)	Escalated to S2 (%)	Direct to S2 (%)
<5	46%	<20	2%	0%	2%
<10	22%	<60	30%	28%	28%
>10	30%	<100	13%	22%	9%
unknown	3%	>100	33%	22%	37%
		total >20	75%	72%	74%
		Pending (over 20 days)	22%	13%	21%
		Withdrawn	3%	6%	2%

## KPI 4: The average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage

The average (mean) time in working days to respond at stage 1, stage 2 and after escalation.

Average working days	Stage 1	Stage 2 overall	Escalated to S2	Direct to S2
	10.6	108.3	78.5	119.4

### **3. Analysis**

#### **Stage 1**

Stage 1 complaints are normally responded to by the local area where the issue arose. Forty-six percent of all complaints considered at Stage 1 were resolved in five days or fewer. The average time taken to respond to a complaint at Stage 1 was 10.6 working days, which is lower than previous years. The average time taken to respond to a complaint at Stage 1 in 2021-22 was 12 working days.

The CHP identifies that complaints are most effectively handled and resolved locally through front-line resolution. In 2022-23 five percent of cases handled at Stage 1 were escalated to Stage 2 because the complainant was dissatisfied with the response they had received. This indicates an effective level of frontline resolution and complainant satisfaction, which has improved year on year (8% in 2021-22, 11% in 2020-21 24% 2019-20).

The Complaints Resolution Office have continued to work with colleagues across the University to support and improve complaints handling at Stage 1. This has been enhanced by additional resource recruited to the team in 2023.

#### **Stage 2**

As well as the 18 cases that were escalated from Stage 1, 43 complaints were considered directly at Stage 2. This is when cases are determined to be more complex or where it is considered unlikely that resolution can be achieved at Stage 1. In total there were 61 Stage 2 complaints. For comparison there were a total of 83 complaints considered at Stage 2 in 2021-22. Two Stage 2 cases were withdrawn by the complainant prior to conclusion.

In those cases that require full investigation (where acceptable resolution is not achievable), the investigation can often take longer than 20 days to conclude because they are often complex and may involve sensitive issues which require careful consideration. Where there are clear and justifiable reasons for extending the timescale, there is scope to do so as part of the Complaints Handling Procedure. This is clearly communicated to the complainant.

On average, Stage 2 cases took 108.3 working days to conclude. This compares to 79.7 in 2021-22, 59 working days in 2020-21 and 65 in 2019-20. Stage 2 cases have taken longer to conclude than previous years. This is due to the two case managers in post having left in December 2022 and January 2023. Their replacements started in January 2023 and March 2023 respectively. The new team have been managing a backlog of cases, in addition to the transition period, undergoing training and developing experience within the role.

The complexity of cases has continued to increase, and delays have been contributed to in some cases by availability of relevant colleagues required to input to the complaint remedy or response, difficulty contacting the complainant, the complainant taking longer to respond, or because investigation was put on hold at some point at the request of the complainant.

### **Total number of complaints received in comparison to previous years.**

The table below illustrates the incidents reported to the Complaints Resolution Office.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Total Incidents	-	-	-	607	644
Request for service and/or information	-	-	-	93	189
Referred to another procedure	-	-	-	64	53
Complaints which have been submitted that beyond the timeframe set out in the CHP or cannot be considered under the CHP	-	-	-	4	3
Stage 1	119	133	172	364	336
Stage 2 (Overall)	47	58	72	84	61

Since the introduction of Ivanti to record cases in 2021-22, all incidents have been logged.

### **Overall themes for 2022-2023**

Quarter 1 of 2022-23 was impacted by the accommodation crisis and related admissions decisions.

The 2022-23 academic year also saw a continuation of Industrial action. This year the impact was heightened by the addition of a Marking and Assessment boycott (MAB) to previous strike activity (which resulted in class cancellations). The uncertainty caused by strike action, particularly the MAB, led to concerns being raised. The majority of these were raised before the conclusion of the action therefore these were handled as requests for information in the first instance. It is notable that a number of these concerns were raised by third parties on behalf of students. There have been some complaints relating directly to the MAB which have been taken forward in 2023-24 (after conclusion of the MAB) and will feature in next years' report.

A continuing theme which has been apparent in previous years is cases regarding PGR students experience. The issues tend to relate to supervisory arrangements and range from academic suitability to supervise the project, to accusations of bullying and harassment.

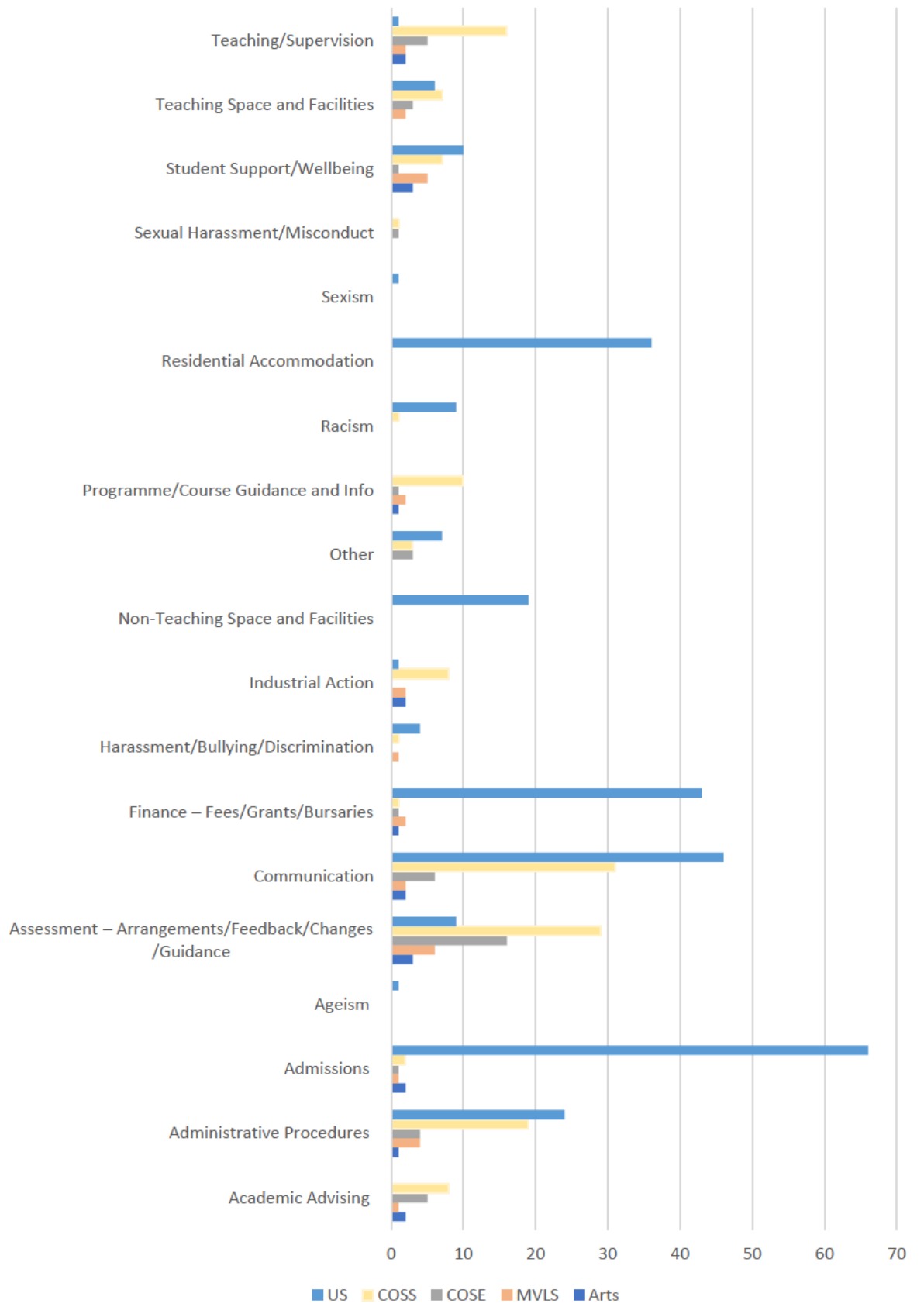
Overall, communication continues to be a key issue raised by complainants This includes lack of, unclear or incorrect communication as well as communication mode or tone.

### **Categories of complaints**

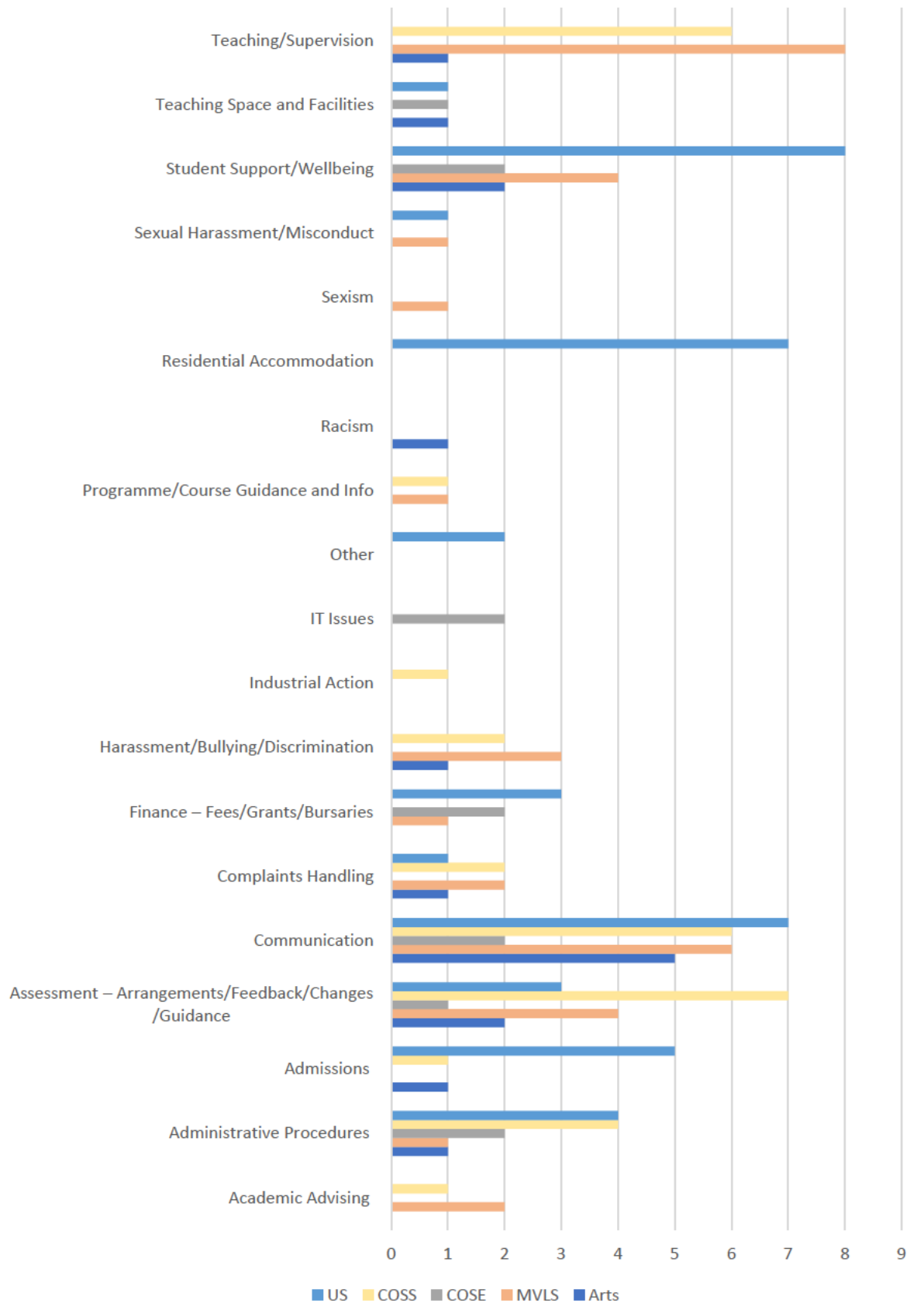
Top 5 categories of complaints at Stage 1 and Stage 2.

	<b>STAGE 1</b>	<b>STAGE 2 (Overall)</b>
<b>1</b>	Communication	Communication
<b>2</b>	Admissions	Assessment – Arrangements/Feedback/Changes/Guidance
<b>3</b>	Assessment – Arrangements/Feedback/Changes/Guidance	Teaching/Supervision
<b>4</b>	Administrative Procedures	Student Support/Wellbeing
<b>5</b>	Finance – Fees/Grants/Bursaries	Administrative Procedures

### S1 by College and Categories



### S2 by College and Categories



## **Overall themes by college**

### **College of Arts**

- Complaints in the College of Arts are spread across a range of issues. Communication is the most frequently complained about issue. Notably, perceived lack of, or poor, communication has contributed to complaints about other issues, for example implementation of support for students regarding disability or wellbeing needs.

### **College of MVLS**

- The issues that are most complained about are teaching and supervision and communication. Complaints about teaching and supervision often relate to PGR studies.
- There were several concerns about assessment, including the provision of information on forthcoming assessments.

### **College of Science & Engineering**

- The issue most complained about is Assessment - arrangements/ feedback/ changes/ guidance.
- Administrative issues, particularly surrounding course enrolment and graduation processes - this links with concerns about communication.

### **College of Social Sciences**

- The issues most complained about are Communication, Assessment – Arrangements/Feedback/Changes /Guidance, Administrative Procedures and Teaching/Supervision.
- Complaints often related to registration and enrolment issues, lack of response to queries, unclear information and communication around assessments.

### **University Services**

- As in previous years, there were a number of complaints from students with additional support or wellbeing needs, who have complained about the support arrangements and/or the challenges they have faced in navigating University life.
- The Accommodation crisis at the start of this reporting period and the related admissions decisions and communications. These factors generated a large number of complaints which presented additional pressures for the relevant teams and the complaints team.
- Other issue which are most frequently complained about in relation to University Services relate to finance (refund requests), communication and administrative procedures.

## **Learning and process improvement**

The pattern of complaints highlights areas in which the University needs to make changes and improvements to its provision.

- Clarity and timeliness of communication to students continues to feature significantly. A number of recommendations from complaints in 2022-23 relate to review of and enhanced clarification around information to students.
- A number of recommendations relate to the need to enhance sharing of information between teams, schools and service areas to ensure a joined-up approach, has also be identified through a number of complaints received this year.

### **Changes to the CRO in 2022-2023**

The team has changed and expanded in this timeframe – growing from 3.5 staff to 5.5 staff. Four new team members joined between January and March 2023. This includes an additional post in response to the Ross Report.

The Complaints Resolution Office has moved from Student and Academic Services to a newly formed grouping including Legal and Contracts, Student Conduct and the Court Office.

The additional resource has led to the following changes:

- Team has been restructured to allow 2 members of staff to focus on Stage 2 complaints and 2 staff to focus on Stage 1 complaints and data management. Which has led to increased prioritisation and improved management of cases.
- Increased focus on distinguishing concerns that should be handled as requests for Service or Information or referred to another procedure, from issues that can be considered under the CHP.
- Improved focus on Stage 1 complaints enables staff to work with local areas to manage cases effectively, manage complainants' expectations re. timeframe and identify appropriate resolution options.
- Improved data management to enhance quality and frequency of reporting.
- Improved communication with key staff in Schools/ Colleges and central University Services.
- Review of processes and procedures and development of an annual operational plan

In response to the Ross Report and its recommendations, the Complaints Resolution Office has been working with colleagues in People and Organisational Development and Student Conduct to ensure that cases that have overlap between procedures are being handled effectively.

The Complaints Resolution Office have been working with a number of Schools and Service areas to enhance complaint handling and learning from complaints.