

University of Edinburgh

Complaint Report, Academic Year 2023-24

The University of Edinburgh recorded a total of 436 complaints during the 12-month period 1 August 2023 to 31 July 2024.

1. Introduction

The University's [Complaint Handling Procedure](#) (CHP), which is based on the [Model Complaint Handling Procedure](#) published by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), has two stages.

Complaints responded to at Stage 1, often referred to as 'frontline' resolution, should receive a response within 5 working days, unless an extension is granted for good reason. The maximum response time for Stage 1 complaints is 10 working days, and when not possible to meet this deadline, the complaint must be referred for consideration at Stage 2. Stage 2 complaints should receive a response within 20 working days; however, there is provision within the CHP to extend this timeframe.

On 1 September 2022 the SPSO introduced four [Key Performance Indicators](#) for the Higher Education sector: this document contains the University's annual performance data, which is published in accordance with SPSO reporting requirements.

2. Stage 1 complaints

396 complaints were considered at Stage 1 of the CHP, of which 14 were subsequently escalated and received a response at Stage 2; therefore, upwards of 96% of complaints did not progress beyond the 'frontline' stage.

209 (60%) of Stage 1 complaints received a full response within 5 working days, a further 77 (22%) received a response between working days 6 and 10, and 60 complaints (17%) received a response after more than 10 working days. The average response time at this stage was 6.92 working days; an improvement from last year when the average response time was 8.75 working days.

Table 1, below, summarises the outcomes of Stage 1 complaints responded to during this reporting period as both a number and a percentage, where the latter is relative to the total number of Stage 1 complaints to reach conclusion^[1].

Complaint Outcome	Number	(%)
Resolved ^[2]	78	(22.5%)
Fully Upheld	100	(29.0%)
Partially Upheld ^[3]	52	(15.0%)
Not Upheld	116	(33.5%)

Table 1: Stage 1 Complaints responded to by outcome.

3. Stage 2 complaints

54 complaints were considered at Stage 2 of the CHP, of which 14 had previously received a Stage 1 response. The remaining 40 complaints progressed directly to Stage 2, typically because, upon receipt, it was considered it would not be possible to make a full response within the maximum 10 working day timeframe stipulated for Stage 1.

3.1 Complaints escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2

Of the 14 complaints escalated to Stage 2, 9 (64%) received a full response within 20 working days, with the average response time for escalated complaints being 36.5 working days; an improvement from last year when the average response time was 86 working days.

Where investigation of escalated complaints exceeded 20 working days, delays were due to difficulty contacting the complainant, the investigation pausing at the complainant's request or staff absence, e.g., delays from individuals being interviewed or those acting as investigators.

Table 2 contains information relating to the outcomes for complaints that were escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2.

Complaint Outcome	Number	(%)
Resolved ^[2]	0	(0.0%)
Fully Upheld	2	(14.3%)
Partially Upheld ^[3]	1	(7.1%)
Not Upheld	11	(78.6%)

Table 2: Outcome of complaints escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2.

3.2 Complaints taken directly to Stage 2

25 complaints (62%) which were considered at Stage 2 from the outset received a response within the 20-working day target. 15 complaints (37%) received a response in more than 20 working days. The average response time for these complaints was 27.5 working days, in comparison to 11 working days last year.

The number of complaints that were taken directly to Stage 2 is summarised according to outcome in Table 3.

Complaint Outcome	Number	(%)
Resolved ^[2]	0	(0.0%)
Fully Upheld	1	(2.5%)
Partially Upheld ^[3]	4	(10.0%)
Not Upheld	35	(87.5%)

Table 3: Outcome of complaints taken directly to Stage 2.

4. Complaint trends and actions taken to improve service

Due to the relatively low number of cases resolved or upheld at Stage 2, limited information can be drawn from trends and learning associated with these complaints. This report does therefore not include specific examples of learning outcomes or improvements to services made as a result of complaints considered during this reporting period, as doing so could result in the identification of a complainant from such information. However, examples from academic year 2014-15 onwards are published at, <https://www.ed.ac.uk/university-secretary-group/complaint-handling-procedure/procedure/complaint-handling-reports>.

[1] Complaints can be withdrawn by the complainant after submission; therefore, not all complaints received by the University progressed to the point where an outcome was reached.

[2] A complaint is resolved when both the University and the complainant agree what action (if any) will be taken to provide full and final resolution, without making a decision about whether the complaint is upheld or not upheld.

[3] Many complaints cover several issues. Where any of these are upheld, the outcome for the whole investigation is recorded as 'partially upheld'.