

University of Edinburgh

Complaint Report, Academic Year 2024-25

The University of Edinburgh received a recorded total of 488 new complaints during the 12-month period 1 August 2024 to 31 July 2025.

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, but an extension can be 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. Extended timelines are seen often with complex and lengthy complaint submissions, involving numerous matters or when staff or complainant involvement is delayed due to availability.

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

450 complaints were submitted at Stage 1 of the CHP, of which 11 were subsequently escalated and received a response at Stage 2; therefore, upwards of 97.5% of complaints did not require to be progressed beyond the 'frontline' stage.

Of the 450 Stage 1 complaints received, 400 received a complaint finding by the end of 2024/25 academic year.

Of the 400 Stage 1 outcomes; 259 (64.75%) of Stage 1 complaints received a full response within 5 working days, a further 97 (24.5%) received a response between working days 6 and 10, and 44 complaints (11%) received a response after more than 10 working days. The average response time at this stage was 6.92 working days; on par with 2023/24 academic year.

Table 1, below, summarizes 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]	150	(37.5%)
Fully Upheld	94	(23.5%)
Partially Upheld ^[3]	48	(12.0%)
Not Upheld	108	(27.0%)

Table 1: Stage 1 Complaints responded to by outcome.

3. Stage 2 complaints

38 complaints were considered at Stage 2 of the CHP, of which 11 had previously received a Stage 1 response. The remaining 27 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 11 complaints escalated to Stage 2, 6 (54.5%) received a full response within 20 working days, with the average response time for escalated complaints being 39 working days; a slight increase in time taken from 23/24 when the average response time was 36.5 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. Moreover, a noted trend in the size and complexity of complaint submissions has led to delays due to the time taken to review hundreds of pages and documentation. The use of AI in development of complaint submissions has also led to unnecessary complexities requiring significant time and resource.

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

Complaint Outcome	Number	(%)
Resolved ^[2]	1	(9.1%)
Fully Upheld	0	(0%)
Partially Upheld ^[3]	2	(18.2%)
Not Upheld	8	(72.7%)

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

3.2 Complaints taken directly to Stage 2

12 complaints (44.4%) which were considered at Stage 2 from the outset received a response within the 20-working day target. 15 complaints (55.6%) received a response in more than 20 working days. The average response time for these complaints was 35.7 working days, in comparison to 25.7 working days last year.

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

Complaint Outcome	Number	(%)
Resolved ^[2]	0	(0.0%)
Fully Upheld	0	(0.0%)
Partially Upheld ^[3]	3	(11.1%)
Not Upheld	24	(88.9%)

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 these on 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 Stage 2 complaints considered during this reporting period, as doing so could result in the identification of a complainant from such information.

However, some generalized examples of trends and learning points have been provided below in consideration of complaints received at Stage 1 and 2 of the procedure across 2023/24:

Trends (Generalized)

- Complaints related or in reaction to protest action at University campus/events
- Expectations and understanding of Reasonable Adjustments
- Accommodation issues; typically related to rent owed, fines for damage or disagreement on lease clauses being applied
- Fees and Financial determinations on fee status or fees owed following withdrawal
- Communication surrounding decision making leading to a lack of understanding of University regulations or policies
- Complaints regarding Staff and Student Conduct

Learning Points (Generalized across various local areas)

- Establishment of working groups to discuss University policies and action related to protest matters; reaffirming the University's commitment to freedom of expression
- Clearer School guidance provided to students on the withdrawal process and a simplified withdrawal process
- Reinforcement to staff on setting expectations of processes and meetings and then delivering clearer decision making and how it is related to regulations

- Staff reminded that, whilst compensation only complaints are not accepted; financial redress may be considered if warranted by action/inaction from the University. Provision of the SPSO's redress policy and apology guidance to be shared at complaints briefings
- UG Curriculum reviews set up in a School to address the volume and spread of assessments following concerns raised
- Early mitigation and leadership discussions to mitigate potential disruptions to study within some Schools
- Good practice in the co-ordination of responses amongst various areas when complaints are made to several departments/staff on the same matter
- General guidance and encouragement that all staff can handle complaints and should do so efficiently; whilst also reminding to signpost or use "out of office" messages to avoid any delay in response
- Review and development of the [Student Complaints Relating to Staff Conduct Procedure](#)

[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'.