

UWS Complaints Handling Procedure Session 14/15 - Annual Report

1. Introduction

This report provides brief details on how the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) dealt with its complaint handling procedures for academic session 2014/15. In session 2014/15, the University had four campuses in Ayr, Dumfries, Hamilton and Paisley and a total of 15,511 students.

Prior to the start of session 2014/15, the University undertook a reorganisation of its Academic Schools and Professional Services Departments. There are now six academic schools – Business and Enterprise, Education, Engineering and Computing, Health, Nursing and Midwifery (HNM), Media, Culture and Society (MCS).

2. UWS Complaints Handling Procedures

The Scottish Higher Education model Complaints Handling Procedure (the model CHP) was developed by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)¹ in partnership with a working group of Higher Education (HEI) complaints experts.

The purpose of the ‘model CHP’ is to provide a standardised approach to dealing with complaints across the Higher Education sector in Scotland. In particular, the aim is to implement a consistent process for students and other users to follow which makes it simpler to complain, ensures staff and complainant confidence in complaints handling and to encourage public bodies to make best use of the lessons learned from complaints.

The model relies on a two stage process:

1. Stage 1 Frontline Resolution - the School or Professional Services Department will attempt to resolve the complaint quickly (ideally within five working days).
2. Stage 2 Complaint Investigation - where Stage 1 has not been able to resolve the complaint to the satisfaction of the complainant then a Stage 2 investigation will be initiated. A Stage 2 investigation is dealt with by a trained senior member of staff; they should aim to complete the investigation within 20 working days.

Details of the University’s Complaint Handling Procedure can be accessed from: <http://www.uws.ac.uk/complaints>

¹ The SPSO Web site provides more information on the service - <http://www.spsso.org.uk/>

3. Reporting on Complaints

Part of the model CHP requires HEIs to annually publish complaints handling performance information, based around a set of high-level Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) related to the CHP (see the table below).

Key Performance Indicators
The number of Complaints Received
The number of Complaints Resolved at Stage 1
The number of Complaints which proceeded to Stage 2
The number of Stage 1 complaints which needed more than 5 working days
The average time to resolve a Stage 1 Complaint
The number of Stage 1 Complaints which were Upheld, Partially Upheld and Not Upheld
The number of Stage 1 Complaints received by School or Department
The number of Stage 1 complaints listed by category
The number of Stage 2 complaints
Number of Stage 2 complaints which needed more than 20 working days
The average time to resolve a Stage 2 Complaint
The number of Stage 2 complaints which were Upheld, Partially Upheld and Not Upheld
The number of Stage 2 complaints received by School or Department
The number of Stage 2 complaints listed by category

This is the second annual report on how UWS deals with complaints using the new SPSO Complaints Handling model. The report is for the period 1st August 2014 to 31st July 2015. The diagrams on Pages 5, 6 and 7 provide a pictorial representation of the University's performance against the KPIs.

4. Analysis of the information

Stage 1

Last year there were 73 Stage 1 complaints while this year there were 64. This reduction is a welcome annual improvement, however while the University met the 5 day target for completing the Stage 1 process last year, it failed to meet the target this year. The reasons provided by the Schools and Professional Services Departments for the delays in completing the local investigations within the 5 working day period, were the complexity of some of the investigations and the difficult in getting interviews with students at certain times of the year (particularly holidays and assessment diets) .

Another factor which may have produced delays in dealing with Stage 1 Complaints was the reorganisation of the University's Academic Schools and Professional Services Departments at the start of session 2014/15. This brought in a number of new senior staff to manage the Schools and Professional Services Departments. As these members of staff were also identified as the Stage 1 Investigating Officers it led to competing priorities for their time and subsequent delays in completing some of the investigations.

Looking at where Stage 1 complaints arose (as shown in the graph on Page 5) it can be noted that compared to last year there has been an increase in the number of complaints arising in the Academic Schools and a reduction in those from the Professional Services Departments. In particular the number of complaints in Engineering and Computing (11) this year is much larger than last year's total of 5. However it can also be noted that all 11 complaints were resolved by the School of Engineering and Computing at Stage 1 with no case proceeding to Stage 2.

The pattern in the categories of Stage 1 complaints shown in the graph on Page 6 is similar to that for last year. 'Student Experience' is again the largest complaint category. However as this category covers a wide range of issues and problems identified by students it is probably to be expected. It is noted that last year we had 16 'Student Experience' Stage 1 complaints while this year it has fallen to 11.

Stage 2

In session 2013/14, 11 Stage 2 complaints were investigated while this year 12 Stage 2 complaints were dealt with. The average time to resolve a Stage 2 Complaint this year slightly exceeded the 20 working day time window. This was partly due to a complex contractual dispute investigation.

Comparing last year's Stage 2 investigations with this year's (shown on Page 5) it can be noted that this year there were more School related complaints rather than those involving the Professional Services Departments. With such a small sample size however it is hard to identify whether this is a trend or simply a one-off occurrence.

The categories of complaints for Stage 2 this year is shown in the graph on Page 7. If this is compared with a similar graph for last year's Stage 2 complaints it is difficult to identify any trend in the types of complaints - again mainly due to the small sample size.

5. Changes or improvements to services or procedures as a result of the consideration of a complaint

It is important to learn any lessons from a complaint, in order to minimise repeat complaints and to improve the services we provide to our students and stakeholders. In this light Schools, Departments and Stage 2 Investigation Officers are expected to provide 'lessons learned' information at both Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the complaints process.

The University has a database of the lessons learned information captured during the complaints process. The Stage 1 information is provided by individual Schools and Professional Services Departments when completing the Stage 1 complaints process. The Stage 2 information is provided by the Stage 2 Complaint Investigating Officer and is sent to the relevant School or Professional Services Department at the conclusion of the Stage 2 investigation.

Examples of the lessons learned this year included:

- A need for better and more consistent communication with the university's research students.
- A need to provide more detailed feedback to applicants for research studentships.
- A need for more frequent and consistent communication with students regarding part-time provision.
- A need to ensure students receive the earliest notification possible where a module has had to be cancelled.

6. Future developments

It is pleasing to note the reduction in the number of Stage 1 complaints, indicating that the Schools and Professional Services Departments are getting better at dealing with issues, concerns and problems before they become complaints. However it is disappointing to note the failure to meet the 5 working day investigation window.

To address this issue the way the Stage 1 process is administered will be changed. Instead of the complaints being administered locally at the Schools and Professional Services Departments this function will now be centrally administered through the Academic Services Department.

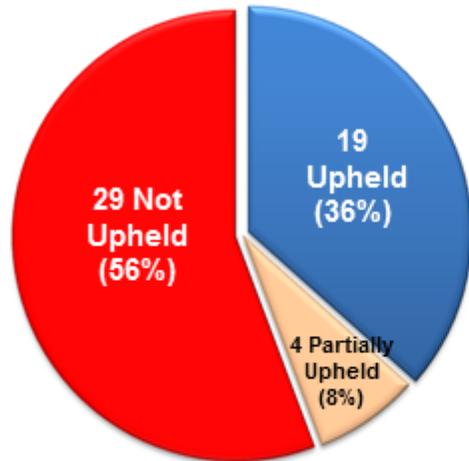
In addition, the number of Stage 1 Investigators will be increased to enable more flexibility in assigning complaints, with the aim of improving the turn-round time for a Stage 1 investigation.

To further embed complaints into the University's enhancement process this report together with more specific School/Department complaints information will be sent to each of the Schools and Professional Services Departments. This will allow the Schools and Professional Services Departments to use this feedback in the production of their annual development plans.

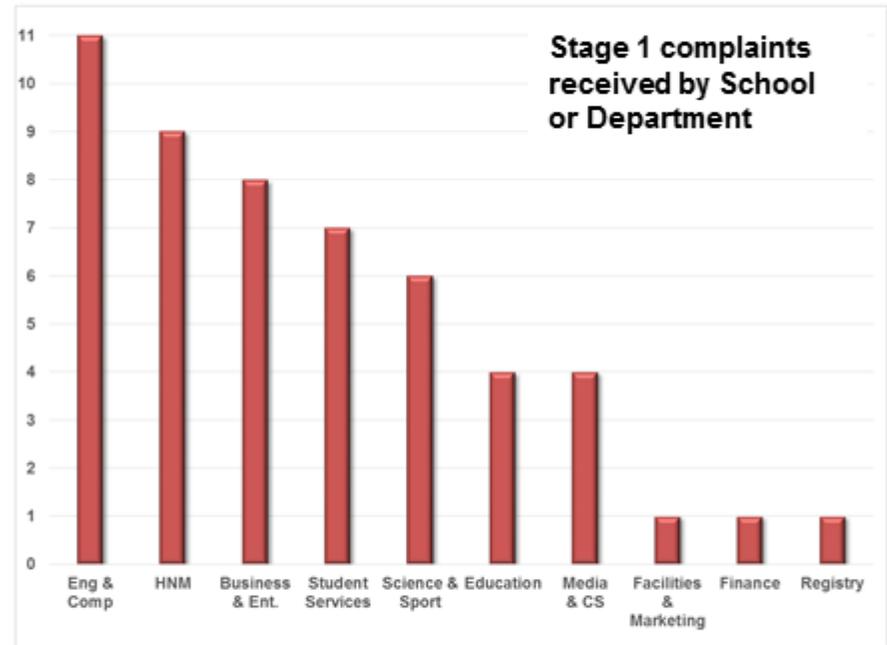
Complaints Record 1st August 2014 to 31st July 2015

Total number of UWS students	= 15,511
Number of Complaints received	= 64
Complaint resolved at Stage 1	= 52 (81%)
Complaint proceeded to Stage 2	= 12 (19%)

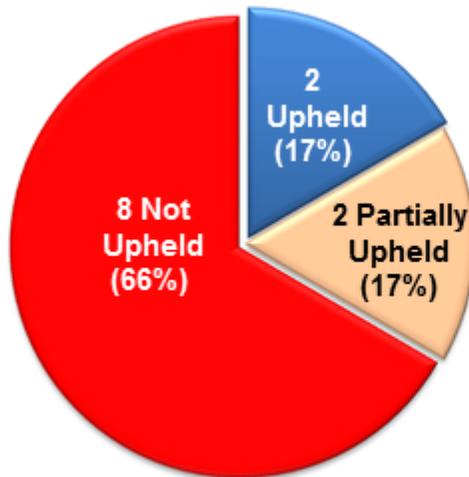
Number of Stage 1 complaints = 52



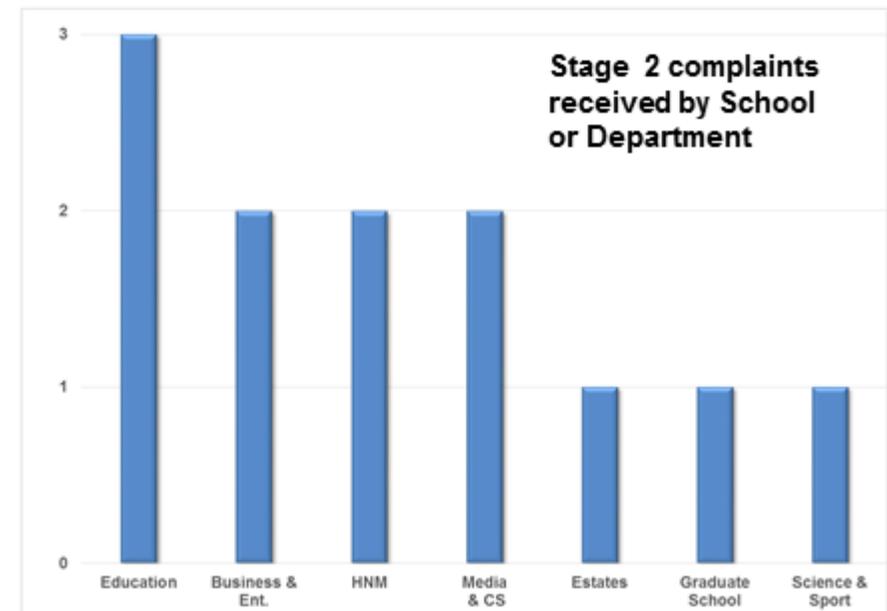
30 Stage 1 complaints required more than 5 working days to complete.
The average time to resolve a Stage 1 Complaint = 9 working days



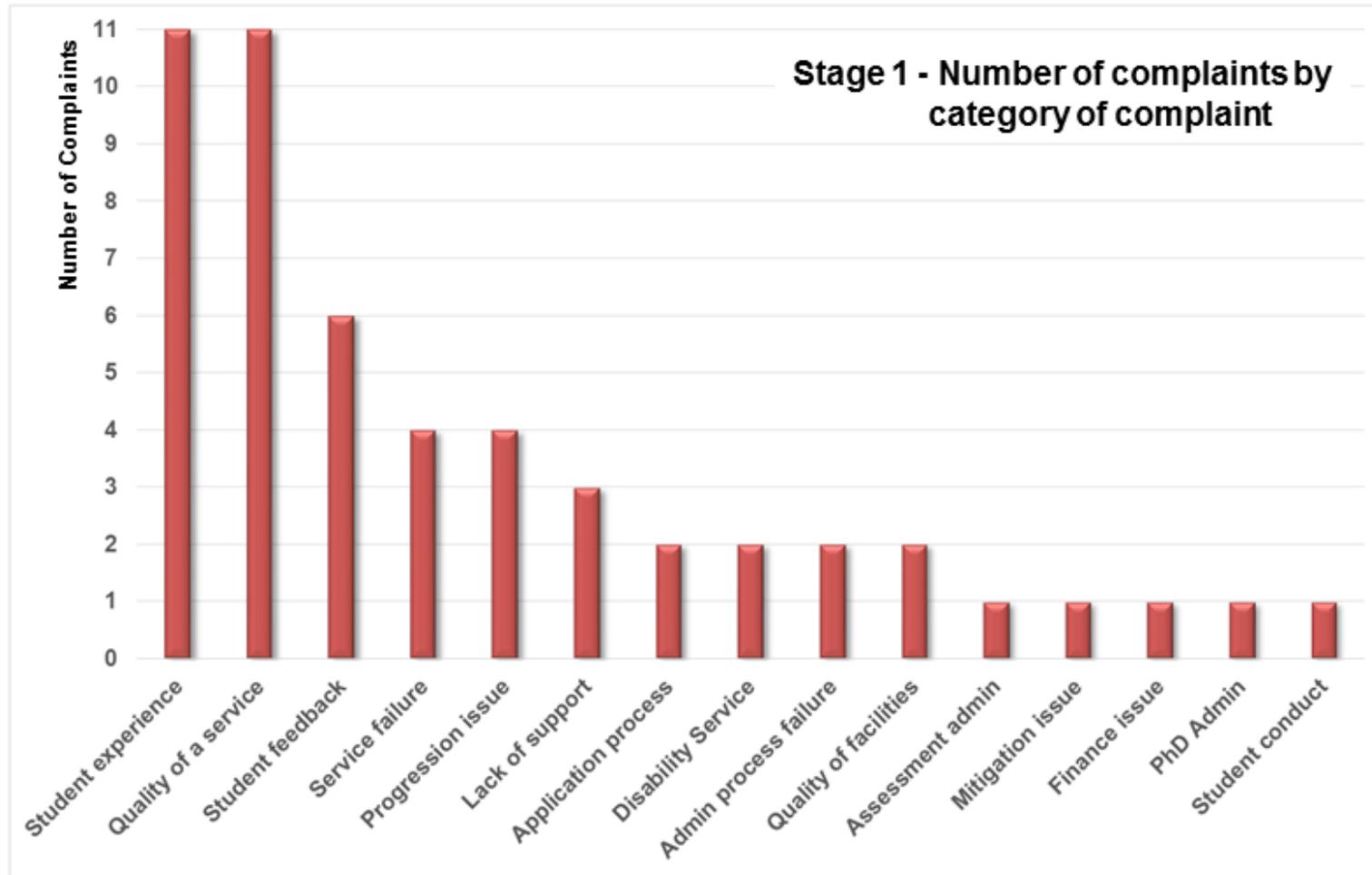
Number of Stage 2 complaints = 12



5 Stage 2 complaints required more than 20 working days to complete.
The average time to resolve a Stage 2 Complaint = 23 working days



Complaints Record 1st August 2014 to 31st July 2015



Complaints Record 1st August 2014 to 31st July 2015

