

UWS Complaints Handling Procedure

Session 2024/2025 - Annual Report

Introduction

This annual report covers the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) operation of its Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) for the academic session 2024/2025 and provides statistics on the number of complaints considered under its CHP.

Reporting on Complaints

This is the 12th annual report on UWS complaints management using the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) Complaints Handling Procedure model. The SPSO oversees complaints management procedures for higher education and can also adjudicate on complaint outcomes after procedures have been completed within the University. The report covers the period from 1st August 2024 to 31st July 2025.

In accordance with SPSO procedures complaints are managed at:

- Stage 1 – Frontline resolution with a target resolution timescale of up to 5 working days, and/or;
- Stage 2 – Investigation with a target resolution timescale of up to 20 working days (while recognising that complex cases may take longer).

In addition, and at either stage, complaints may be resolved early without full completion of the procedure – where both the complainant and the University agree on an appropriate course of action in response to the concern raised without there being a determination of whether the complaint has been upheld or not upheld.

Overview of Standard Indicators

As part of the model CHP, statistics are reported on the four standard indicators set by the SPSO and are broken down by quarter for the year along with an overview of the current annual totals and trends from previous years.

Indicator One: The total number of complaints received per year over the last 5 years

Total number of complaints received	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Number of complaints at both Stage 1 and Stage 2)	42	45	61	108	82

Breakdown of complaints considered at each Stage	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24*	2024/25**
Stage 1	31	31	48	90	72
Stage 2	11	14	13	17	16

**One of the 108 complaints received were not completed (1 at Stage 1 was referred to another process)*

*** Six of the 82 complaints received were considered at both Stage 1 and Stage 2*

Figures for 2024/25 count all complaints that were received in the reporting period (August 1 2024 to 31 July 2025). Data broken down by Quarter (see Appendix 1) gives information on all complaints received in that quarter (even if the complaint was completed later in the year, or was escalated to S2 later in the year). Demographic data relating to student complaints is presented in Appendix 2. There were five complaints received at the end of 2023/24 (late July 2024) which were concluded after the end of the year, details of these is provided in Appendix 3.

In session 2024/25 there were 72 Stage 1 complaints made. Following a significant increase in Stage 1 complaints in 2023/24 (increasing to 91 cases compared to 48 in 2022/23), the 72 cases represents a drop from last year, however this remains higher than all years prior to 2023/24 over the reporting period.

In session 2024/25, 16 Stage 2 complaints were opened for investigation levelling out the steady increase over the preceding five years.

Indicator Two: percentage of complaints at each stage closed in full within the set timescales of five and 20 working days – 2024/25

Quantitative Indicator 2	No.	%
Number of complaints closed in full at Stage 1 within five working days as % of all Stage 1 complaints responded to in full	34	47%
The number of complaints closed in full at Stage 2 within 20 working days as % of all Stage 2 complaints responded to in full	4	25%

Indicator 2: Previous years	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Stage 1	82%	55%	45%	48%	56%	47%
Stage 2	57%	n/a	86%	61%	76%	25%

Performance in completion rates within the recommended timescales of five working days (Stage 1) and 20 working days (Stage 2) have fallen significantly from previous years. The decline for Stage 1 was due to staffing gaps in the Complaints team and constraints across Schools and Professional Services. Stage 2 performance for this indicator was impacted by long-standing staffing gaps in the Complaints team and a reduced pool of Stage 2 investigators. The Complaints staffing is now back to full complement, and training has been provided to additional Stage 2 investigators with ongoing work to further increase the pool of Stage 2 investigators.

Indicator Three: Average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage – 2024/25

Quantitative Indicator 3 <i>Note: figures are for completed/closed complaints only</i>	Average time in working days
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at Stage 1	13
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at Stage 2	77

Indicator 3: Previous years	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Stage 1	6 days	6.5 days	7 days	7 days	7 days	13 days
Stage 2	17 days	17 days	17 days	18 days	12 days	77 days

The constraints noted around performance for indicator 2 above have also impacted on the overall average completion time for complaints at Stage 1 and Stage 2.

Indicator Four: The outcome of complaints at each stage 2024/25

Quantitative Indicator	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Resolved*	No outcome: Referred to another process or S2	Outstanding	TOTAL
Number of complaints as a % of all complaints closed at Stage 1	31 43%	8 11%	17 23%	7 10%	2 3%	7 open S1s 10%	72
Number of complaints as a % of all complaints considered at Stage 2	2 12.5%	4 25%	8 50%	0	0	2 open S2s 12.5%	16

*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 for the complainant, without making a decision about whether the complaint is upheld or not upheld.

The upward trend in the proportion of Stage 1 complaints upheld reported last year has levelled out at 54% of complaints upheld or partially upheld at this stage both this year and last.

The percentage of Stage 2 complaints upheld/upheld in part has fluctuated over the last five years with the current year showing the highest rate of positive outcomes for complainants.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Stage 2 Complaints Upheld/partially upheld - %	20%	7%	33%	23%	37.5%

Cases Referred to Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)

After completion of the University's complaints procedure, complainants are advised that they have the right to take their case to the SPSO for external review if they are dissatisfied with the complaint outcome or the handling of their complaint. During 2024/25 the SPSO received and considered **10 cases** relating to UWS complaints handling as detailed below. These cases provide useful feedback to the University and include reassurance from SPSO that we are applying our procedures correctly and reasonably.

Cases Referred to SPSO	SPSO Outcome	Notes
7	Case not taken forward	5 - SPSO found the University's handling of the complaint to be reasonable 2 - Out of time

2	File Closed	In one case the complainant was satisfied with further action the University took following dialogue with SPSO. In one case SPSO closed the case as the complainant did not respond to their request for further information.
1	Outcome awaited	

Lessons Learned and Continuous Improvement

An analysis of the nature of complaints shows a wide variety of issues raised. For this year's reporting purposes, complaints data was reviewed to identify themes where learning has either already resulted in service improvement or where further action has been recommended, and enhancement applied across areas. The following themes were identified:

- Disability and Reasonable Adjustments
- Communication
- Learning and Teaching
- Placements and Student Progression

The complaints reviewed during this academic year demonstrate that learning is being actively identified and used to inform improvements across Schools, student support, and wider UWS processes. Actions taken in response to issues raised show that complaints are used not only to resolve individual concerns but also to support wider organisational learning and quality enhancement.

The University's approach to integrating complaints data and outcomes into quality processes to support institutional reflection and drive enhancement has been recognised in our recent Tertiary Quality Education Review. Data on lessons learned shall contribute to a number of activities including the thematic approach to Institution-led Quality Review (ILQR) of Professional Services, and Enhancement and Annual Monitoring.

Appendix 1

2024/25 - Quarterly Breakdown

Indicator One: The total number of complaints

Total number of complaints received	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Number of complaints at both Stage 1 and Stage 2)	48	12	10	12	82

Breakdown of complaints investigated by Stage	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Stage 1	45*	9 ⁺	7 [^]	11 ^{>}	72
Stage 2	6	4	4	2	16

*Of the 48 complaints received, three were reviewed at both Stage 1 and Stage 2

⁺ Of the 12 complaints received, one was considered at both Stage 1 and Stage 2

[^]Of the 10 complaints received, one was considered at both Stage 1 and Stage 2

[>]of the 12 complaints received, one was considered at both Stage 1 and Stage 2

Indicator Two: percentage of complaints at each stage closed in full within the set timescales of five and 20 working days

Quantitative Indicator 2	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of complaints closed in full at Stage 1 within five working days as % of all Stage 1 complaints responded to in full	27	60	5	55	0	0	2	18	34	47
The number of complaints closed in full at Stage 2 within 20 working days as % of all Stage 2 complaints responded to in full	2	33	2	50	0	0	0	0	4	25

Indicator Three: Average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage – 2024/25

Quantitative Indicator 3: Average time in working days	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at Stage 1	6	8	24.5	57	13 days
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at Stage 2	39	85	65.5	85	77 days

**Note: figures are for completed/closed complaints only*

Indicator Four: Complaint Outcomes: Q1 2024/25

Quantitative Indicator	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Resolved*	No outcome: Referred to another process or S2	Outstanding	TOTAL
Number of complaints as a % of all complaints closed at Stage 1	22 49%	5 11%	14 31%	3 7%	1 2%	-	45 100%
Number of complaints as a % of all complaints considered at Stage 2	-	1 17%	4 66%	-	-	1 17%	6 100%

*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 for the complainant, without making a decision about whether the complaint is upheld or not upheld.

Indicator Four: Complaint Outcomes: Q2 2024/25

Quantitative Indicator	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Resolved*	No outcome: Referred to another process or S2	Outstanding	TOTAL
Number of complaints as a % of all complaints closed at Stage 1	4 45%	2 22%	1 11%	2 22%	-	-	9 100%
Number of complaints as a % of all complaints considered at Stage 2	2 50%	1 25%	1 25%	-	-	-	4 100%

*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 for the complainant, without making a decision about whether the complaint is upheld or not upheld.

Indicator Four: Complaint Outcomes: Q3 2024/25

Quantitative Indicator	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Resolved*	No outcome: Referred to another process or S2	Outstanding	TOTAL
Number of complaints as a % of all complaints closed at Stage 1	1 14%	1 14%	2 28%	-	-	3 44%	7 100%
Number of complaints as a % of all complaints considered at Stage 2	-	2 50%	2 50%	-	-		4 100%

*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 for the complainant, without making a decision about whether the complaint is upheld or not upheld.

Indicator Four: Complaint Outcomes: Q4 2024/25

Quantitative Indicator	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Resolved*	No outcome: Referred to another process or S2	Outstanding	TOTAL
Number of complaints as a % of all complaints closed at Stage 1	4 35.5%	0	0	2 18%	1 9%	4 35.5%	11 100%
Number of complaints as a % of all complaints considered at Stage 2	0	0	1 50%	0	0	1 50%	2 100%

*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 for the complainant, without making a decision about whether the complaint is upheld or not upheld.

Appendix 2

Complainant Demographic Data

The demographic data of complainants during Academic Year 2024/25 is presented below.

Campus	No. of Complaints
Ayr	5
Distance Learning	9
Dumfries	4
Lanarkshire	30
London	13
Paisley	21

School / Dept relating to the complaint	No. of Complaints
School of Business and Creative Industries	19
School of Computing, Engineering and Physical Sciences	6
School of Education and Social Sciences	26
School of Health and Life Sciences	14
Admissions	1
Admissions and Finance	1
Disability Services and Estates	1
Doctoral College	1
Finance	1
International Student Recruitment	1
Registry	13

Age Group	Headcount
18-24	13
25-34	24
35-44	7
45-54	8
55-64	3
Unknown	27

Gender	Headcount
Female	39
Male	16
Unknown	27

Ethnicity Group	Headcount
BME	16
White	41
No response	25

Geographical location	Headcount
Home	41

International	13
Rest of the UK (RUK)	1
Unknown	27

Disability	Headcount
No	28
Yes	10
No response	44

Type of Disability	Headcount
Long standing illness or health condition	3
Mental health condition	3
Specific learning difficulty	4

As part of continuous improvement, for Academic Year 2025/26, the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct (ACC) Team will look to review how complaints data is captured to enhance future reporting.

Appendix 3

Complaints from 2023/24 concluded during 2024/25

2023/24 Complaints completed in 2024/25	Number	Outcomes	Closed within timescale
Stage 1	4*	1 Upheld 2 Not Upheld 1 resolved	1 (average 6.6 day completion)
Stage 2	2	2 Not Upheld	0 (average 32 day completion)

*1 case also proceeded to Stage 2 investigation