

Complaints Handling Quarterly Report

Academic Year 2025/26

Quarter 03: 01 February 2026 – 30 April 2026

1. Introduction

The University has a robust Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) in place that mirrors the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO) Model CHP. We value feedback received from students and other stakeholders, and as part of our continuous improvement culture, seek to learn from the feedback received to improve our processes, where appropriate and enhance the student experience.

2. Background

The University manages complaints in line with its published Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP). As outlined in the CHP, key complaints data must be reported on both a quarterly and annual basis. Accordingly, quarterly and annual complaints reports are submitted to the UWS Vice-Chancellor's Executive (VCE) prior to publication. All statistics are presented in accordance with the four standard indicators defined by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), which oversees complaint handling standards across the higher education sector and may review complaint outcomes once the University's internal processes have been completed.

Quarterly reports focus on performance activity within the reporting period and include comparisons with previous quarters, where appropriate. In contrast the annual report adopts a longer-term perspective, analysing trends and patterns over a number of academic years to provide broader institutional insight and support continuous improvement activity.

Complaints are managed through the SPSO's two-stage model:

- Stage 1 – Frontline Resolution, with a target response time of up to 5 working days; and/or
- Stage 2 – Investigation, with a target response time of up to 20 working days, acknowledging that more complex cases may require additional time.

At either stage, complaints may also be resolved early where both the complainant and the University agree an appropriate course of action without the need to complete the full procedure or determine whether the complaint is upheld.

3. Reporting Period and Key Observations

This report covers Quarter 03 of Academic Year 2025/26 (01 February 2026 – 30 April 2026). During this reporting period, twenty-one complaints were received, a

reduction from thirty-five complaints received in Quarter 02. This follows a similar trend as in the previous year with the number of complaints received decreasing. As in previous quarters, the majority of complaints were managed at Stage 1, demonstrating that concerns can generally be addressed at the point of contact without the need for a formal investigation.

Whilst twenty-one complaints were taken forward under the Complaints Handling Procedure, it should be noted that a significant volume of complaint related correspondence and enquiries are received by the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct (ACC) Team. Many of these do not meet the definition of a complaint under the CHP and are redirected to the most appropriate service area for resolution. This includes matters such as requests for information, appeals, academic queries and issues that are more appropriately addressed through existing procedures. The ACC Team plays an important triage and advisory role, ensuring concerns not appropriate to be responded to under the CHP, are signposted to appropriate teams to facilitate timely resolution and a positive student experience. During this reporting period, the ACC Team provided assistance, advice and signposting to approximately fifty students whose concerns did not proceed as formal complaints under the CHP.

During Quarter 03, Assessment, Examinations and Certification remained the most common complaint category, with nine complaints received across both stages. The outcomes of these complaints were one upheld, three partially upheld, two not upheld and three resolved. Where complaints were upheld or partially upheld, apologies were issued and corrective action taken to address concerns raised, such as, revised feedback, application of ECS and remarking of submissions as necessary.

Staff conduct accounted for six complaints during the reporting period. The outcomes of these complaints included one upheld, one partially upheld, three not upheld and one resolved. In response, the ACC Team supports investigators to ensure outcomes are clear and transparent, providing complainants with a detailed explanation of the reasons for decisions reached and an apology, where appropriate. Staff complaints are shared with relevant leadership teams to ensure appropriate oversight and action and to support organisational learning and continuous improvement.

Performance at Stage 1 continues to show positive improvement. The average time taken to respond to Stage 1 complaints reduced from 13 working days in Quarter 02 to 9 working days in Quarter 03. This brings performance within the SPSO maximum timescale of ten working days and reflects the continued focus on resolving complaints at the earliest opportunity. In addition, 44% of Stage 1

complaints were concluded within the five working day target during this reporting period.

While Stage 1 performance has improved, performance at Stage 2 remains challenging. The average response time for Stage 2 complaints increased from 38 working days in Quarter 02 to 59 working days in Quarter 03. This increase is largely attributed to the limited availability of the small pool of investigators available to undertake Stage 2 investigations, alongside their competing workloads.

With the embedding of new Faculties and Faculty Leadership Teams there is a focus in the transition activities in clarity of roles and responsibilities aimed at enhancing the management of Stage 2 complaints. The aim being to strengthen investigative capacity, improve case progression and return performance to within SPSO timescale of twenty working days, where practical and continuing to ensure investigations remain robust, fair and evidence based.

Overall, Quarter 03 demonstrates continued improvement in frontline complaint handling with response times now operating within SPSO expectations and the majority of complaints being addressed at Stage 1. Work is ongoing to address the challenges associated with Stage 2 investigations to improve performance.

4. SPSO Key Performance Indicators

Indicator One: Total number of complaints				
Total Number of Complaints Received	Quarter 01	Quarter 02	Quarter 03	Total
Number of complaints at both Stage 1 and Stage 2	23	35	21	79
Breakdown of complaints investigated by Stage				
Stage 1	17	29	18	64
Stage 2	6	6	3	15
Stage 1 complaints escalated to Stage 2	2	11	3	15

Indicator Two: Percentage of complaints at each stage closed in full within the set timescales of five and twenty working days						
	Quarter 01		Quarter 02		Quarter 03	
		%		%		%
Number of complaints closed in full at Stage 1 within five working days as a % of all Stage 1 complaints responded to in full	0	-	6	21	8	44

Number of complaints closed in full at Stage 2 within twenty working days as a % of all Stage 2 complaints responded to in full	0	-	2	33	0	-
Number of complaints closed in full after escalation within twenty working days as a % of all complaints responded to in full after escalation	0	-	6	55	0	-

Indicator Three: Average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage			
	Quarter 01	Quarter 02	Quarter 03
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at Stage 1	23	13	9
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at Stage 2	88	38	59
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation	50	22	39

Indicator Four: Complaint Outcomes Quarter 03											
	Upheld		Partially Upheld		Not Upheld		Resolved ¹		Outstanding (open)		Total
		% ²		%		%		%		%	
Number of complaints as a % of all complaints closed at Stage 1	3	18	2	12	8	47	4	24	0	0	17 ³
Number of complaints as a % of all complaints considered at Stage 2	0	0	1	33	1	33	0	0	1	33	3
Number of complaints as a % of all complaints closed at Stage 2 - escalated from Stage 1	0	0	1	33	1	33	0	0	1	33	3

¹ A complaint is considered resolved when both the University and the complainant agree what action (if any) will be taken to provide a full and final resolution for the complainant, without making a decision on whether the complaint is upheld or not upheld.

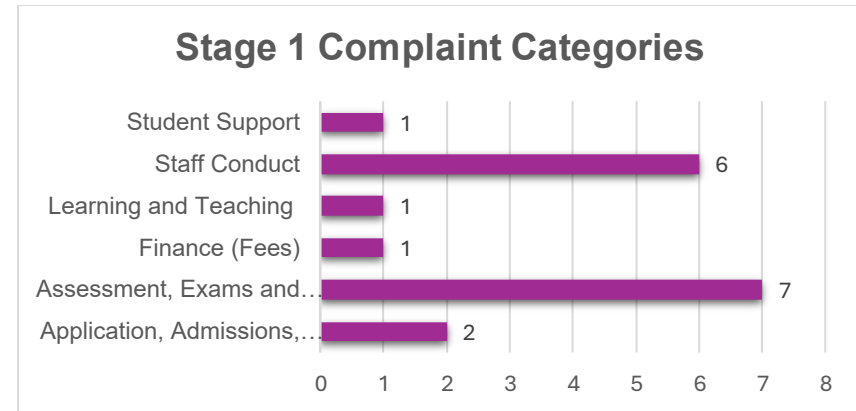
² Percentages do not sum exactly due to rounding.

³ One Stage 1 complaint did not receive a response within the maximum ten-day timeframe and was escalated to Stage 2, in line with the CHP and in agreement with the complainant.

5. Complaints Received by Category

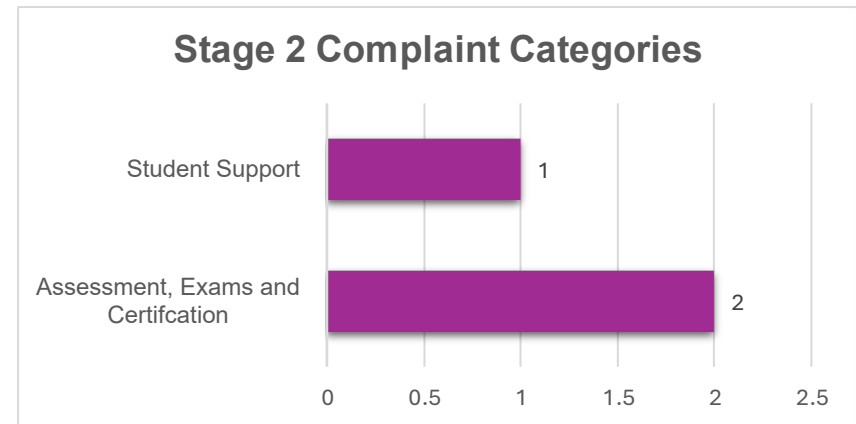
Stage 1 Complaint Categories

Application, Admissions, Interview, Enrolment	2
Assessment, Exams and Certification	7
Finance (Fees)	1
Learning and Teaching	1
Staff Conduct	6
Student Support	1
TOTAL	18



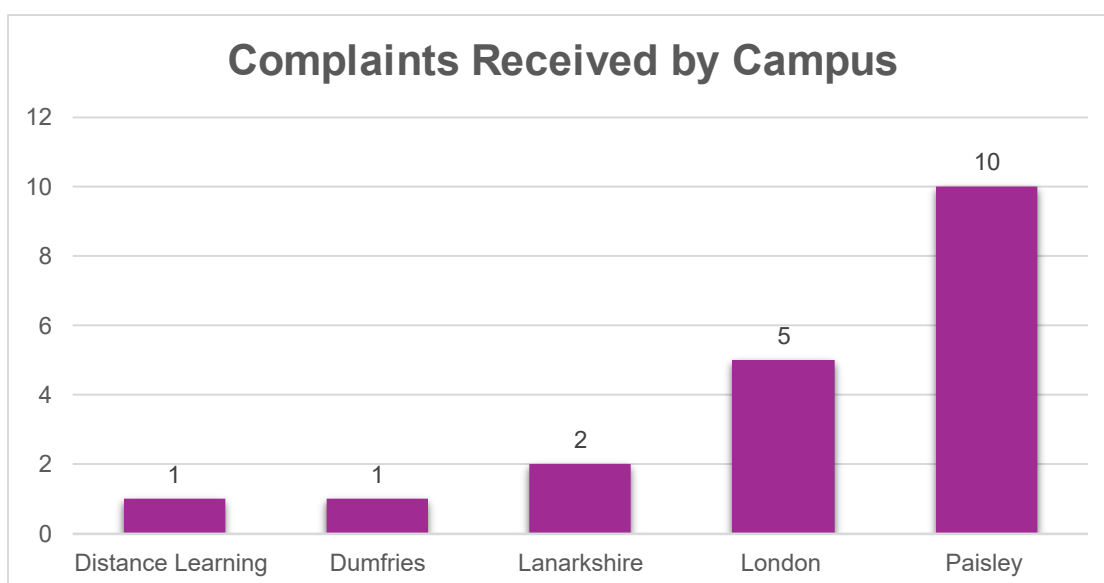
Stage 2 Complaint Categories

Assessment, Exams and Certification	2
Student Support	1
TOTAL	3



6. Complaints Received by Campus

Campus	No. of Complaints
Distance Learning	1
Dumfries	1
Lanarkshire	2
London	5
Paisley	10
TOTAL	19



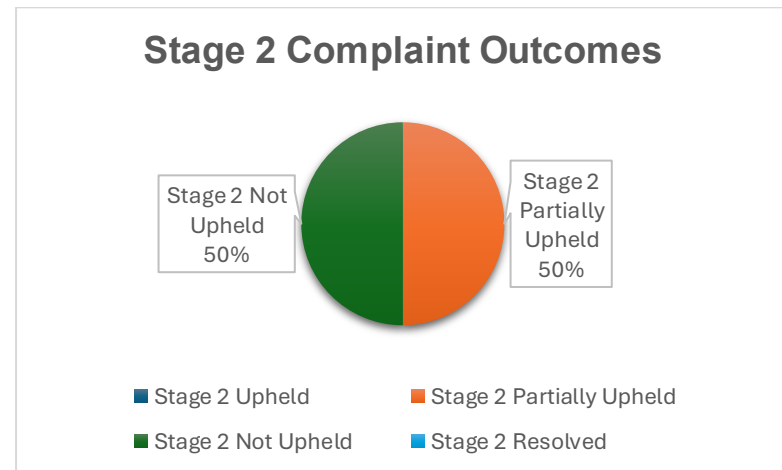
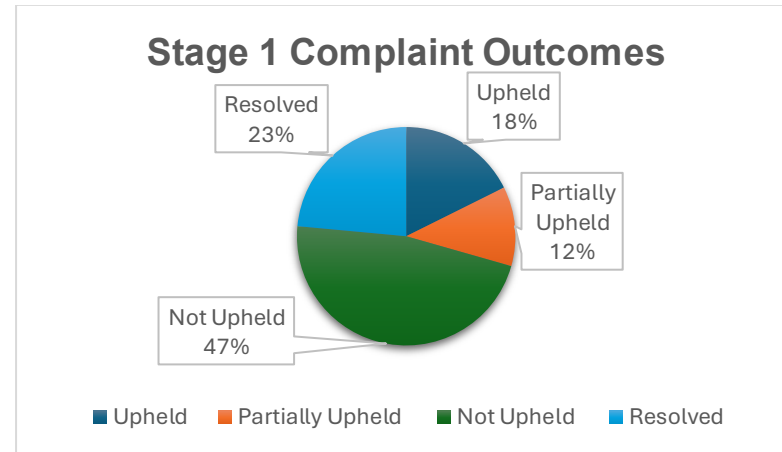
7. Complaint Outcomes

Stage 1 Complaint Outcomes

Upheld	3
Partially Upheld	2
Not Upheld	8
Resolved	4
TOTAL	17

Stage 2 Complaint Outcomes

Upheld	0
Partially Upheld	1
Not Upheld	1
Resolved	0
TOTAL	2



8. Learning from Complaints

Concern	Action Points/Lessons Learned
Delay in issuing of academic documents.	Head of Division (HoD) considered this request and established it was in relation to information required for a reference. The HoD confirmed partial information was issued when requested, however, some specific information required was omitted. The HoD shared the necessary information and apologised for any inconvenience caused.
Dissatisfaction with assessment feedback not in line with the Assessment Handbook.	Complainant was provided with revised feedback aligned with the learning outcomes. In addition, the investigator made recommendations to improve the student experience, including enhancements to assessment feedback, clearer alignment of Turnitin headings with learning outcomes. These were shared with the School for further consideration/implementation.

Complaints received during the reporting period provide valuable opportunities for service enhancement and continuous improvement. Learning arising from complaints is shared with relevant Faculties and Professional Services teams to support improvements in areas such as communication, assessment guidance, assessment feedback and administrative processes. The aim of this activity is to enhance the student experience, address recurring themes and reduce the likelihood of similar complaints arising in the future.

9. Referrals to the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO)

During Quarter 03, the University received seven communications from the SPSO. Five cases were assessed as having received a reasonable response, including four complaints relating to tuition fee/deposit refunds and one concerning the handling of an academic appeal. In each case, the SPSO was satisfied that the University had applied its procedures correctly and provided clear reasons for its decisions. The SPSO also provided feedback on the importance of maintaining regular communication with students throughout the appeals process, an area which continues to be a focus for the ACC Team, as we seek to enhance our processes to improve the student experience.

The ACC Team also responded to one request for information from SPSO during this reporting period. A further complaint relating to the termination of a social

work placement was not taken forward by the SPSO as it had been submitted outwith the statutory timescale.

Overall, SPSO feedback during Quarter 03 provides assurance that the University's decision making and complaint handling processes continue to be applied fairly and consistently in line with our published procedures, and sector complaint handling expectations.

Donald Higgins – Durnan

Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Manager

August 2026