

Complaints Handling Quarterly Report

Academic Year 2025/26

Quarter 04: 01 May 2026 – 31 July 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.

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 04 of Academic Year 2025/26 (01 May 2026 – 31 July 2026). During this reporting period, twenty-three complaints were received, representing a relatively small increase from the twenty-one complaints received in Quarter 03. 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. Of the twenty-three complaints received, seventeen were considered at Stage 1 and six at Stage 2.

Categories of complaints received in this quarter show that assessment related complaints account for the largest proportion of cases (9). While most concluded cases were not upheld¹, the volume of complaints highlight the importance of ensuring students have a clear understanding of assessment processes.

This quarter saw three complaints received under the Course Management category. These complaints related to placements, including communication around placement requirements and student expectations. Although these complaints were not upheld, these complaints highlighted opportunities within faculties to review and improve the clarity and consistency of information provided to students throughout the placement process where appropriate.

Diversity and Equality related complaints (3) focused on disability support at the application stage, parity with other Doctoral College students at Graduation ceremonies, and disability support during studies. Partially upheld complaints highlighted the importance of ensuring communications are accessible, timely and responsive to individual support needs. Learning from these cases has informed a review of applicant communications, while complainant feedback will be used to support the planning and delivery of future Graduation ceremonies.

The outcomes of Stage 1 complaints show that nine complaints were not upheld, two were partially upheld and four were resolved through early resolution, with two complaints remaining open at the end of the reporting period. Where complaints were partially upheld, the University took appropriate action to address identified concerns and shared learning with relevant service areas to support continuous improvement.

Performance at Stage 1 remained relatively stable during Quarter 04. The average time taken to respond to Stage 1 complaints was ten working days, compared to nine working days in Quarter 03. Whilst this represents a slight increase, performance remains significantly improved when compared to earlier quarters and within the maximum ten day SPSO timescales (with extension) for responding. In addition, 29% of Stage 1 complaints were concluded within the five-working-day target timescale.

At Stage 2, while the average time taken to respond to Stage 2 complaints is reported as thirty-eight days, compared with fifty-nine days in Quarter 03, this figure reflects only one complaint that was concluded during the reporting period, with five complaints remaining open at the end of the quarter. The average response time for escalated complaints was twenty-one working days, compared

¹ Three at the time of writing this report.

with thirty-nine in Quarter 03. However, this figure is similarly influenced by the small number of cases concluded during the reporting period. As previously reported, this is a direct consequence of the lack of Stage 2 investigator availability particularly amongst Faculty colleagues. This is being addressed between all Deans and Director Education Enhancement as part of the staffing responsibilities being embedded in the new structures.

At the end of the reporting period, five of the six Stage 2 complaints remained open. One complaint was concluded and was partially upheld following investigation. As the majority of Stage 2 cases remain ongoing, Quarter 04 performance data should be viewed as provisional and will change once these investigations are concluded.

While assessment related complaints continue to represent the largest category of complaints received, no systemic failings in assessment processes were identified through completed investigations. Emerging themes this quarter relate primarily to communication, student expectations and accessibility. Complaints concerning placements and disability related support indicate opportunities to improve early engagement, clarity of information and inclusive communication practices. These themes will continue to be monitored throughout 2026/27 and will inform service enhancement activity across professional and academic services.

4. SPSO Key Performance Indicators

Indicator One: Total number of complaints									
Total Number of Complaints Received	Quarter 01		Quarter 02		Quarter 03		Quarter 04		Total
Number of complaints at both Stage 1 and Stage 2	23		35		21		23		102
Breakdown of complaints investigated by Stage									
Stage 1	17		29		18		17		81
Stage 2	6		6		3		6		21
Stage 1 complaints escalated to Stage 2	2		11		3		6		20
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		Quarter 04		
		%		%		%		%	
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	5	29	
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	-	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	-	1	17	

Indicator Three: Average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage				
	Quarter 01	Quarter 02	Quarter 03	Quarter 04
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at Stage 1	23	13	9	10
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at Stage 2	88	38	59	38
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation	50	22	39	21

Indicator Four: Complaint Outcomes Quarter 04											
	Upheld		Partially Upheld		Not Upheld		Resolved ²		Outstanding (open)		Total
		% ³		%		%		%		%	
Number of complaints as a % of all complaints closed at Stage 1	0	-	2	12	9	53	4	23	2	12	17
Number of complaints as a % of all complaints considered at Stage 2	0	-	1	17	0	-	0	-	5	83	6
Number of complaints as a % of all complaints closed at Stage 2 - escalated from Stage 1	0	-	1	17	1	17	0	-	4	67	6

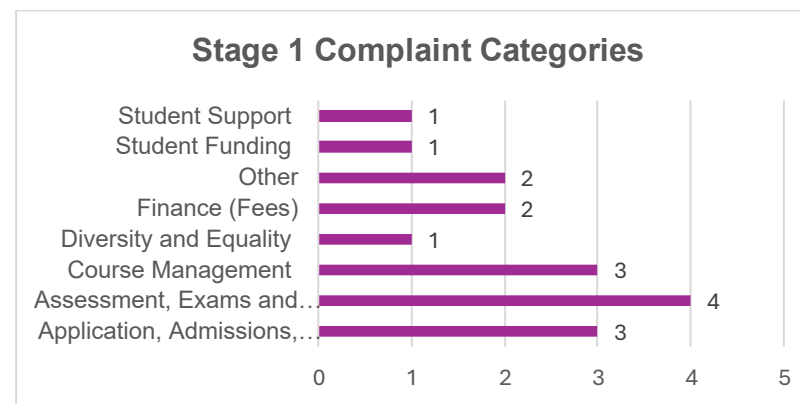
² A complaint is considered resolved when both the University and the complainant agree what action (if any) will be taken to provide a full and final resolution for the complainant, without making a decision on whether the complaint is upheld or not upheld.

³ Percentages do not sum exactly due to rounding.

5. Complaints Received by Category

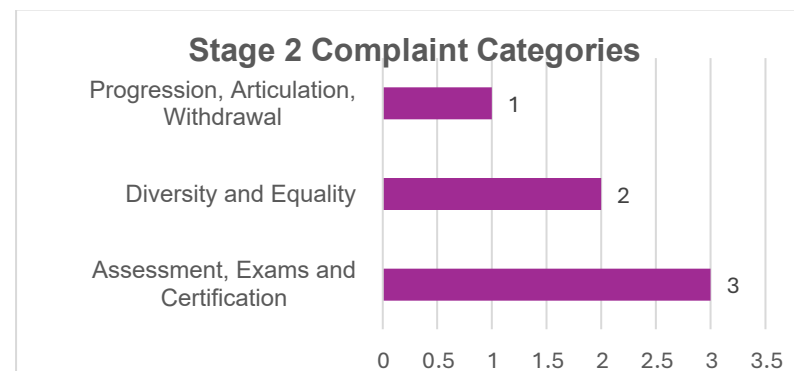
Stage 1 Complaint Categories

Category	No. of Complaints
Application, Admissions, Interview, Enrolment	3
Assessment, Exams and Certification	4
Course Management	3
Diversity and Equality	1
Finance (Fees)	2
Other	2
Student Funding	1
Student Support	1
TOTAL	17



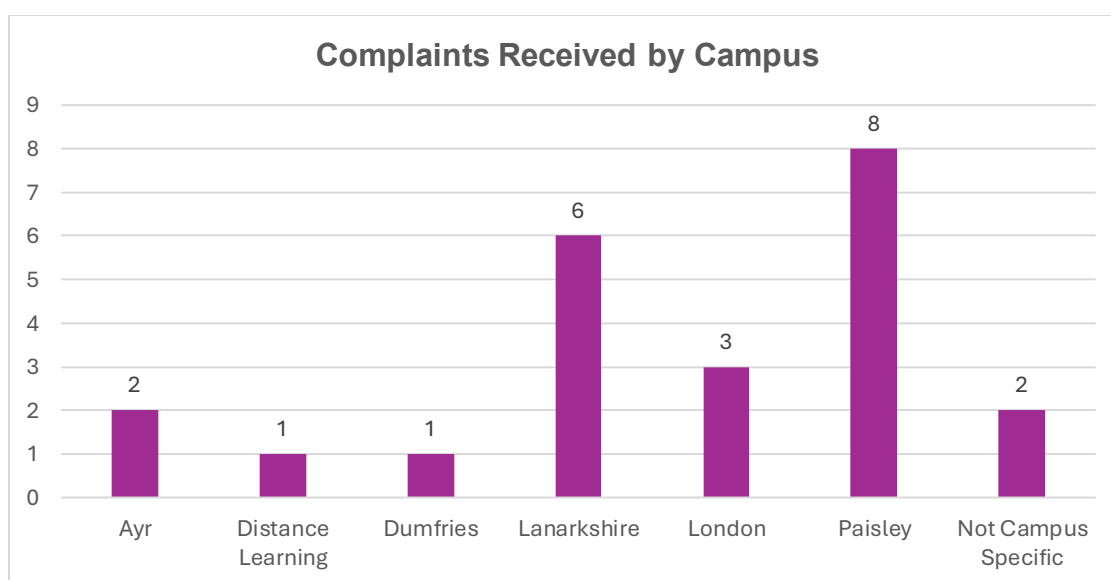
Stage 2 Complaint Categories

Category	No. of Complaints
Assessment, Exams and Certification	3
Diversity and Equality	2
Progression, Articulation, Withdrawal	1
TOTAL	6



6. Complaints Received by Campus

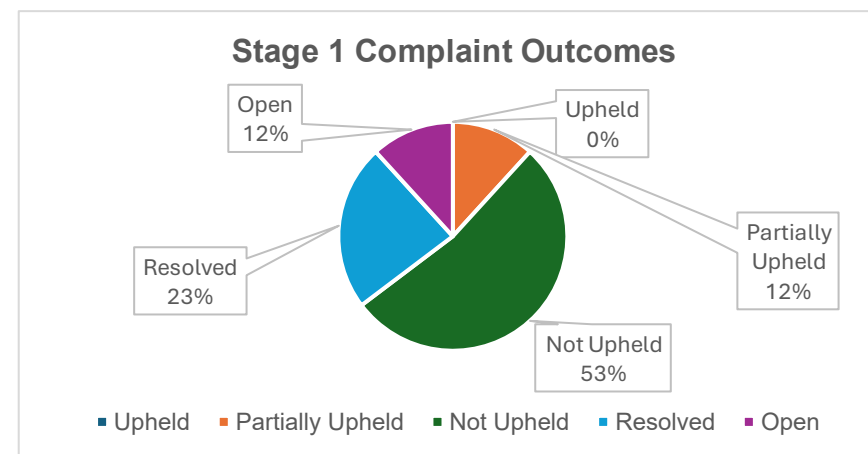
Campus	No. of Complaints
Ayr	2
Distance Learning	1
Dumfries	1
Lanarkshire	6
London	3
Paisley	8
Not Campus Specific	2
TOTAL	23



7. Complaint Outcomes

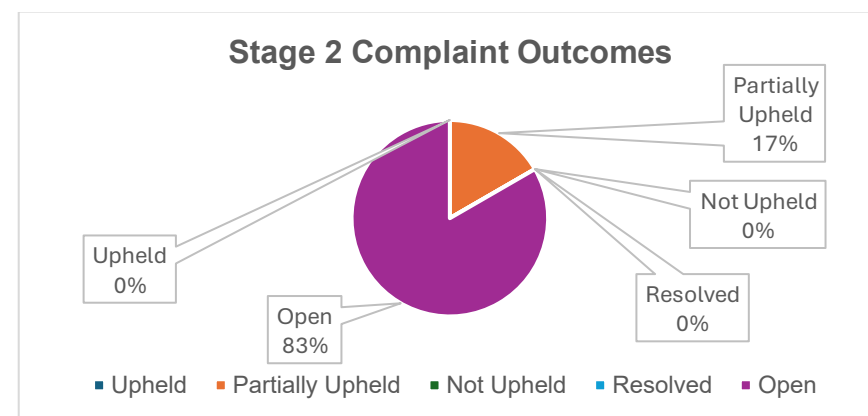
Stage 1 Complaint Outcomes

Upheld	0
Partially Upheld	2
Not Upheld	9
Resolved	4
Open	2
TOTAL	17



Stage 2 Complaint Outcomes

Upheld	0
Partially Upheld	1
Not Upheld	0
Resolved	0
Open	5
TOTAL	6



8. Learning from Complaints

Category / Concern	Action Points/Lessons Learned
Diversity and Equality	UWS Admissions and TEG have committed to reviewing applicant communications to ensure that unsuccessful application decisions are communicated clearly, accessibly, and in a timely manner.
Assessment	Continue to improve student understanding of moderation, marking and reassessment processes through clearer guidance and communication.
Finance (Fees)	Fee information on the University website has been updated to provide greater clarity on repeat study charges. As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, the Head of Faculty Operations and the Senior Team Leader for Admissions are reviewing processes to identify opportunities for streamlining and enhancing the student experience.
Course Management	Regularly review placement briefing materials and guidance to ensure consistent communication regarding placement expectations.
Other - Delay in receiving complaint outcome	An apology was issued for the delay, with an explanation provided regarding investigator availability. The University is actively addressing the expansion of its investigative capacity to help improve response times and enhance the overall efficiency of complaint investigations for Academic Year 2026/27.

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

During Quarter 4, the University received twelve communications from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). Seven cases were assessed by the SPSO, which concluded that the University had responded reasonably, applied its procedures appropriately, and provided clear explanations for the decisions and actions taken. These cases related to extenuating circumstances appeals, tuition fees, the student experience during the cyber incident, communication regarding assessment arrangements, an appeal against the

Senate Disciplinary Committee's decision, and the application of the Suspension Procedure.

The SPSO determined that two cases could not be taken forward. One related to a matter subject to a legal process, while in the other case the complainant had not completed the University's complaints procedure and was therefore referred back to the University.

At the end of the quarter, three cases remain under SPSO assessment. The University provided the requested information within the specified timescales and is awaiting the SPSO's decisions.

Donald Higgins – Durnan

Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Manager

August 2026