

## Complaints Handling Procedure Annual Report 2014/15

### Background

1. The Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 gave the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) responsibilities and powers, specifically, to oversee the development of model complaints handling procedures (CHP) for each sector including higher education. The main aims of the model CHP are early resolution of a complaint as close to the point of contact as possible and making best use of lessons learned from complaints.
2. All Scottish universities were required to adopt the two stage model CHP by 30 August 2013. Following the internal approval of a suitable procedure by Court, on the recommendation of Senate, the University implemented the CHP on 27 August 2013. The University's Complaints Handling Procedure is available here: <http://www.strath.ac.uk/media/ps/strategyandpolicy/ComplaintsHandlingProcedure.pdf>

### Recording and Reporting

3. It is a requirement of the SPSO's model CHP that the University records all complaints and that reports detailing key performance information are submitted quarterly to the Executive Team and annually to Court. SPSO Guidance indicates that such reports are expected to contain:
  - performance statistics detailing: complaints volumes, types and key performance information, e.g. on the time taken and the stage at which complaints were resolved
  - the trends and outcomes of complaints and the actions taken in response including examples to demonstrate how complaints have helped improve services
4. Annex A provides key performance information on the volume and types of complaints received during 2014/15 and on the resolution times achieved. It also provides qualitative information on some of the actions taken or recommendations made to deliver service improvement in response to complaints received by the University during 2014/15. In parallel with the introduction of the CHP, the University has developed a central recording system enabling the production of the statistical reports at Annex A.

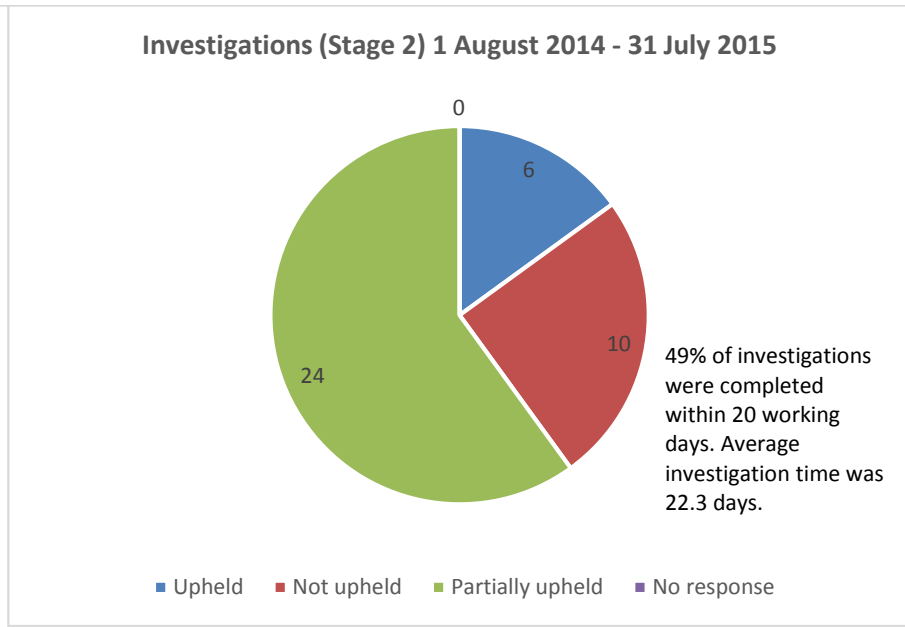
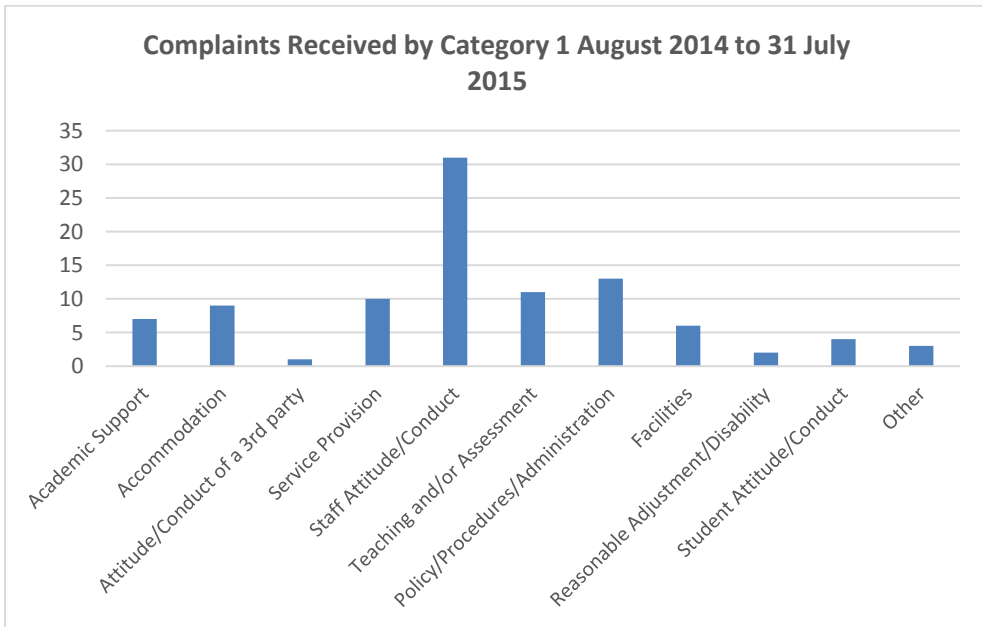
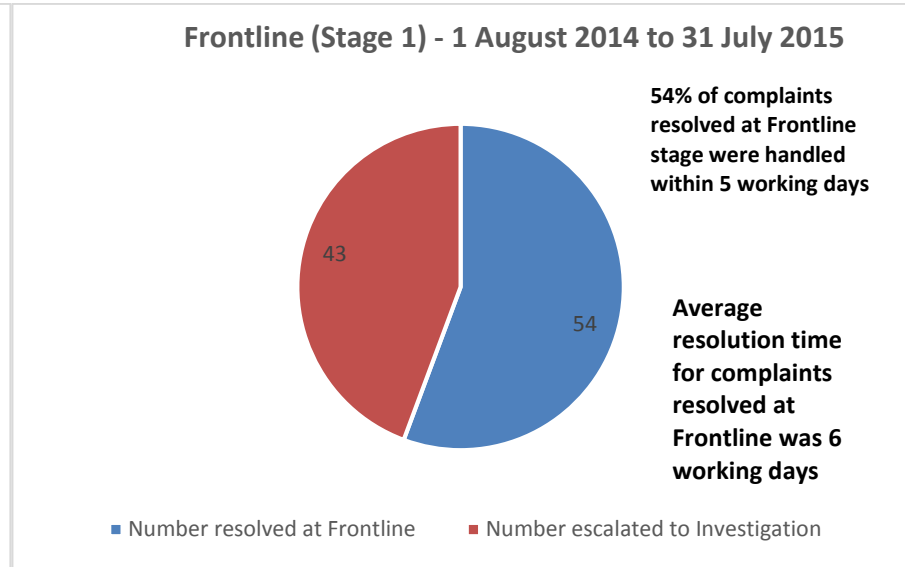
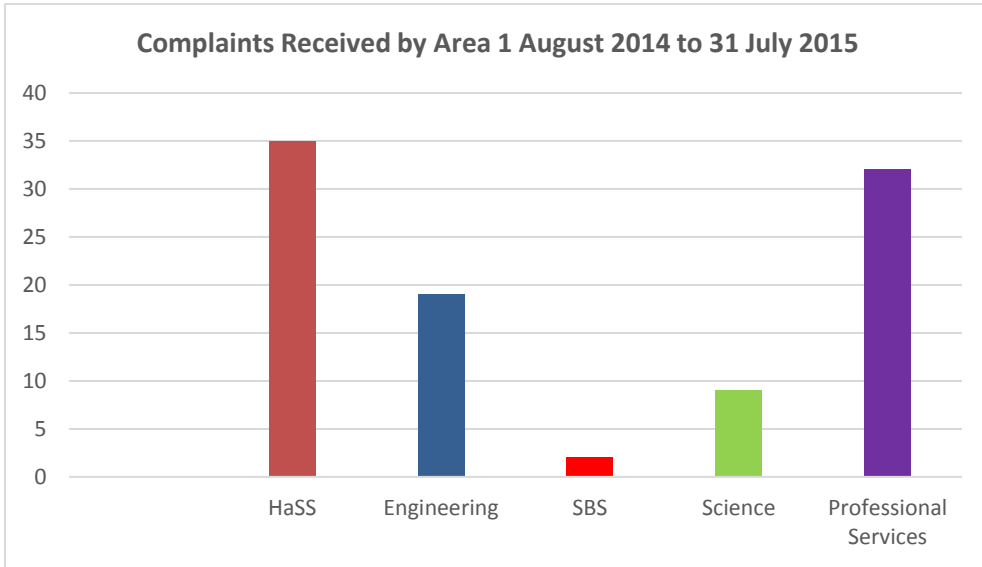
### Summary Analysis

5. The University has recorded 97 complaints since the start of the 2014/15 academic year on 1 August 2014. The majority of complaints were received from students or former students of the University. Additionally, a number of complaints were received from members of the public and prospective applicants, making up almost 11% of the total number of complaints.
6. Complaints were received in all Faculties and in some Professional Services areas. There were however no complaints recorded in Human Resources or Information Services. Within the academic area, the University's largest Faculty in terms of student numbers, Humanities and Social Sciences, received the highest number of complaints and Strathclyde Business School (the smallest in terms of student numbers) the lowest number. The Faculty of Engineering recorded the second highest number of complaints, with Science third. 33% of complaints were received in the Professional Services areas, mainly Estates, Student Experience and Enhancement Services and the Recruitment and International Office.

7. The percentage of complaints resolved at frontline fluctuated throughout the year, dropping from the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter at 76%, to 33% in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter, with a far greater percentage of complaints being escalated to investigation stage in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter than in previous quarters.
8. The average time taken to resolve frontline complaints was fairly static throughout the year, 6.4 days, slightly above the 5 day maximum stipulated by the procedure. The average time taken to investigate complaints dropped from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter but averaged 22.2 days, slightly above the 20 working days anticipated. 53% of investigations were carried out within the 20 working day deadline.
9. The most frequent types of complaints recorded were those relating to:
  1. Staff Attitude and/or Conduct (31%)
  2. University Policy, Procedures or Administration (13.5%)
  3. Teaching and/or assessment (11.5%)
10. Staff record learning and action taken to improve services, with examples of the learning recorded included at Annex A.
11. Staff are engaging with the complaints process, although there has been a rise in time taken to respond to frontline complaints and investigations. 2014-15 has seen a drop in the number of complaints resolved at Frontline (54%) within 5 working days, compared with 73% in 2013-14. This could be due to the complexity of complaints, however it is a statistic that should be monitored.

#### **Recommendation**

12. Court is invited to **note** the Complaints Handling Annual Report for 2014/15.



## ANNEX A

### Learning from Complaints – Examples

<b>Complaint Category</b>	<b>Complaint</b>	<b>Learning/Recommendations</b>
University Policy, Procedures or Administration	Delay in getting information and assistance from Disability Services after initial assessment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student status on system better identified to ensure thorough tracking.</li> <li>• Set slots to allow for 'emergency' meetings</li> <li>• Better information released to students regarding provisional adjustments.</li> </ul>
Teaching and/or Assessment	Student experienced disruption during class test.	Ensure that invigilation packs contain all relevant material.
Teaching and/or Assessment	Student's name spelt wrong resulting in confusion and erroneous information given to the student.	Staff reminded to take particular care with unfamiliar names as the impact of a misspelled name on the student could be significant.
Teaching and/or Assessment	Student concerned over lack of information/guidance/organisation of a tutorial group.	Course to develop a robust induction plan for tutors.
Teaching and/or Assessment	Student complained that a tutor lost an audio recording submitted for an assignment and took too long to pass the recording on for marking.	Pilot some potential solutions to identify the most effective including: Encryption of all submitted recordings, StrathCloud used for submission, recordings immediately transferred to an encrypted folder and the recording returned to the student, recordings returned as soon as assignment marked.
Staff Attitude and/or Conduct	Student complained of lack of helpfulness of staff dealing with students seeking components for an experiment.	A review of the operation of the section was recommended and will be taken forward by the Department.
Teaching and/or Assessment	Joint complaint around quality of teaching, lack of support, and poor course management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School to improve quality and provision of learning materials;</li> <li>• Clear guidance be provided concerning independent study and the circumstances in which this approach might be adopted;</li> <li>• Improvements be made and clarifications concerning timetabling and communication.</li> </ul>
Service Provision	Dissatisfaction with length of time between submission of application for exchange placement and final decision.	Students to be informed when decisions are likely and will be provided with a realistic timeline ahead of their applications
University Policy, Procedures or Administration	Student was told she does not qualify for programme, contradicting the entry requirements stated on the website.	The information on the website will be updated to accurately reflect entry requirements.
Staff Attitude and/or Conduct	Student appealed regarding his failed placement. Placement was discounted. Student complained about the outcome. Student had met with his tutor but felt misinformed by tutor.	Course team recommended to take specific steps to remind tutors of the need to be clear and explicit in their communications with students around the outcome of placements and in consequence their recommendations to the Board of Examiners.