

## Complaints Handling Procedure Annual Report 2015-16

### 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 (CHPs) 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 2015/16 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 2015/16. 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

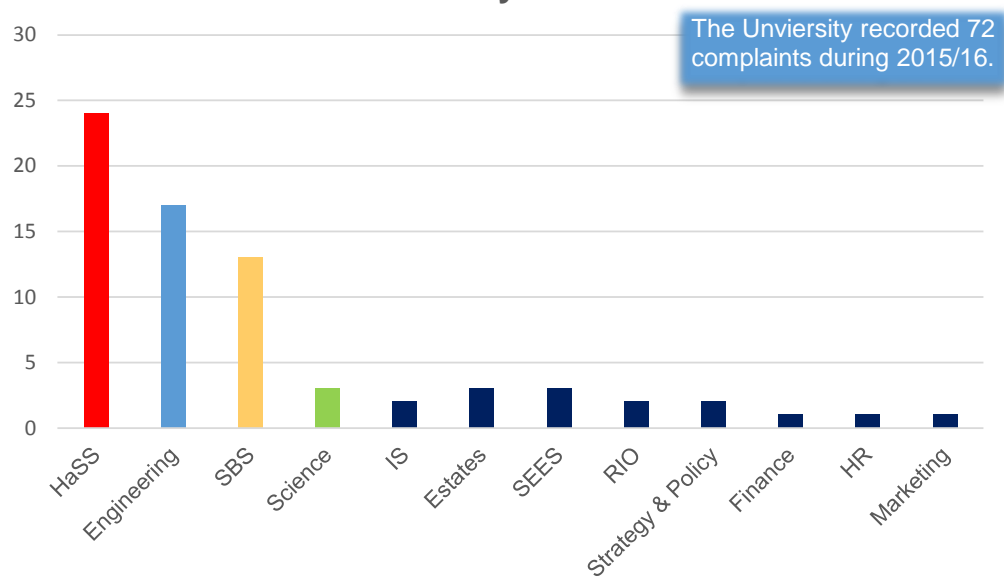
5. The University has recorded 72 complaints since the start of the 2015/16 academic year on 1 August 2015. The majority of complaints were received from students or former students of the University. Additionally, a number of complaints were received from members of the public and prospective applicants, making up around 13% of the total number of complaints.
6. Complaints were received in all Faculties and across key Professional Services areas with the University's largest Faculty (by student numbers), Humanities and Social Sciences, receiving the highest number. 21% of complaints were received in the Professional Services areas, mainly Estates Services and Student Experience and Enhancement Services.

7. The percentage of complaints resolved at frontline fluctuated throughout the year, averaging 47% with a greater percentage of complaints being escalated to investigation stage in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter than in previous quarters, dropping slightly in the final quarter.
8. The relatively high percentage of complaints being escalated to investigation stage has been noted and discussions are underway to explore methods of encouraging more frequent frontline resolution and recording. The slight decrease in the final quarter would suggest recent and positive movement in this area.
9. The average time taken to resolve frontline complaints fluctuated slightly throughout the year, averaging 5.6 days, slightly above the 5 working day target. 2015/16 reversed the previous year's drop in the number of complaints resolved at Frontline within 5 working days with 74% resolved in that timescale compared to 54% in 2014/15. This rose to 100% in the second half of the year.
10. Investigations carried during 2015/16 (Stage 2 of the CHP) took, on average, 24.7 days, slightly above the 20 working days anticipated. This is reflective of the number of complex complaints received which often require consultation with outside agencies and partners. However, investigations conducted during the final quarter of 2015/16 took an average of 19.6 days.
11. The most frequent types of complaints recorded throughout the year were those relating to:
  1. Teaching and/or assessment (29%)
  2. Staff Attitude and/or Conduct (18%)
  3. University Policy, Procedures or Administration (16%)
12. Staff are required to record lessons learned and actions taken to improve services and some key examples of the learning points recorded are included at **Annex B**.
13. Generally, staff are engaging well with the CHP and its requirements, although more can be done and is being done to encourage earlier resolution (Stage 1). A need to reduce the proportion of complaints being escalated to the investigation stage has been noted and discussions are underway to explore methods of encouraging more frequent frontline resolution. The slight decrease in the final quarter would suggest recent and positive movement in this area.

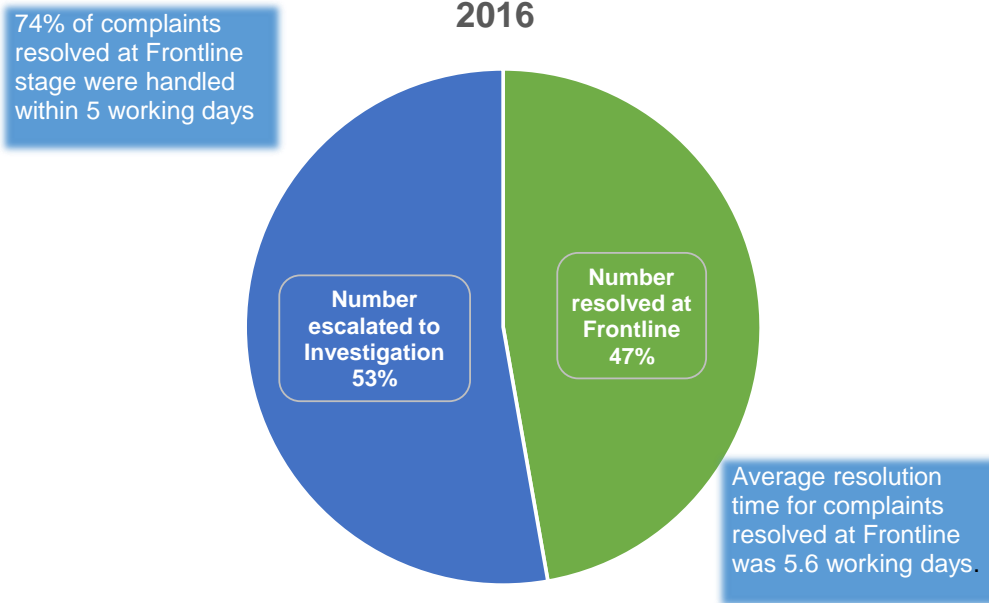
## **Recommendation**

14. Court is invited to **note** the Complaints Handling Annual Report for 2015/16.

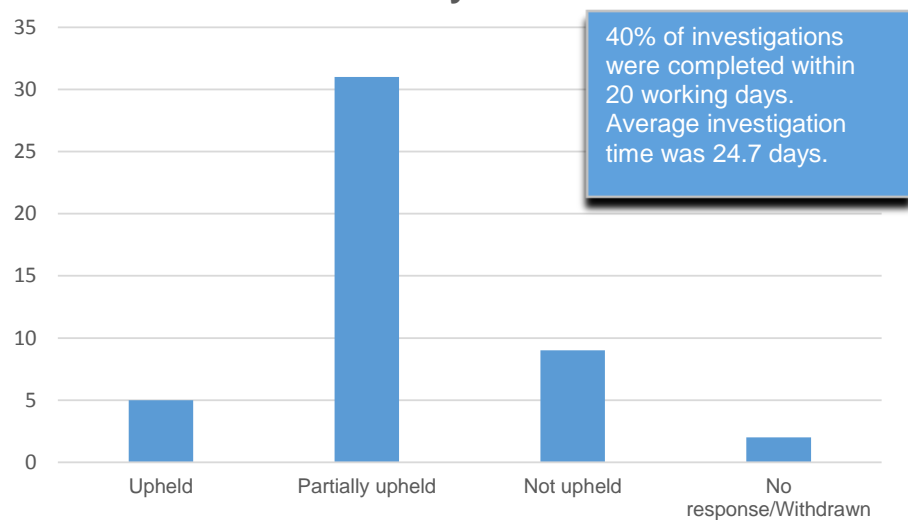
Complaints Received by Area 1 August 2015 to 31 July 2016



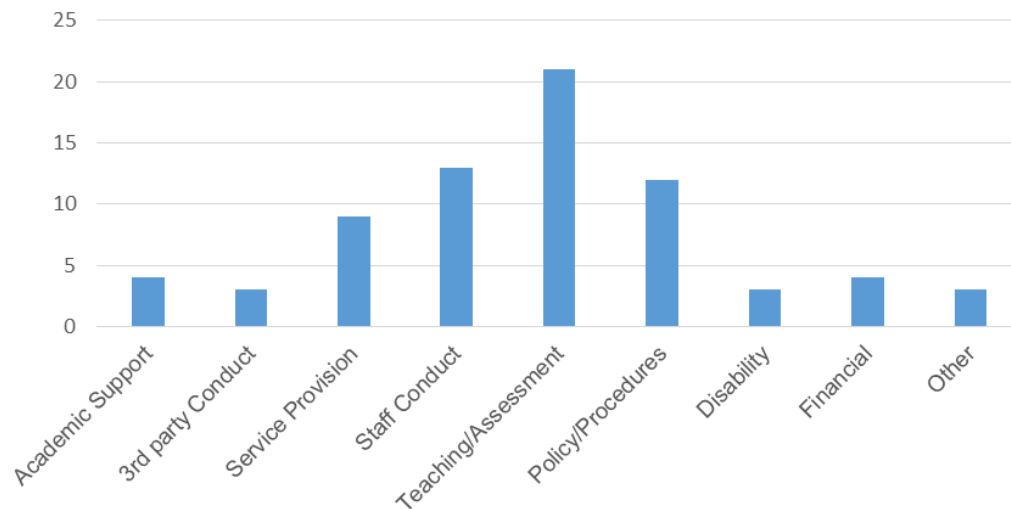
Frontline (Stage 1) - 1 August 2015 to 31 July 2016



Investigations (Stage 2) 1 August 2015 - 31 July 2016



Complaints Received by Category 1 August 2015 to 31 July 2016



Learning from Complaints – Examples

<b>Complaint Category</b>	<b>Complainant</b>	<b>Complaint</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Learning/Recommendations</b>
University Policy, Procedures or Administration	Applicant for employment	A candidate who applied for two posts within the same team was invited to attend one interview which covered both posts but was not made aware of this in advance.	No response	Interview invitations sent from the e-recruitment system to be manually changed to ensure candidates are advised when they are being invited to one interview for two posts.
Financial Issues	Student	Complainant not happy with increase in tuition fees.	Resolved	Faculty Manager to confirm that the new student record system specification contains the facility to set a fee per student as opposed to a fee per course, to avoid any change being copied to all students on all years of that course.
Academic Support	Student	Student unaware of procedure for submission of Personal Circumstances.	Partially Upheld	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Course Handbook to be updated to identify the process and forms to be used to report Personal Circumstances.</li> <li>2. An enhanced message in the signature section of tutor e-mails should include text and links to remind students about the processes and where to find the relevant forms.</li> </ol>
Teaching and/or Assessment	Student	Complaint concerning inconsistent advice regarding the word count of an assignment.	Resolved	Department to standardise assignment cover sheets in future years.
Service Provision	Applicant for employment	Delayed payment of claim for interview expenses.	Resolved	<p>Actions in progress within Finance:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. examining the end to end progress of the claim to identify point(s) of delay and reasons</li> <li>2. implementing corrective actions to minimise the risk of recurrence</li> <li>3. customer service champions to lead on improved customer service</li> </ol>
Other	Student	Student refused Erasmus application based on results and language ability.	Partially Upheld	Department will review guidance given to students on requirements and process for Erasmus exchanges.

**ANNEX B**

<b>Complaint Category</b>	<b>Complainant</b>	<b>Complaint</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Learning/Recommendations</b>
Teaching and/or Assessment	Student	Student dissatisfied with the quality of the course.	Partially Upheld	Course Team to ensure that Student Staff Committee meets at least once per session and preferably once per semester.
University Policy, Procedures or Administration	Student	An error in the system which allocated extra graduation guest tickets resulted in only students with a low registration number receiving extra tickets.	Partially Upheld	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An additional randomisation of the students to receive additional tickets to be conducted in future.</li> <li>2. Where tickets are returned by students a more transparent process for distribution of these tickets is recommended for future graduation ceremonies.</li> </ol>
University Policy, Procedures or Administration	Student	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Potentially misleading advice regarding timing of visa application.</li> <li>2. Reasons for withdrawal on PEGASUS letter were not sufficiently detailed to guide an appeal.</li> </ol>	Partially Upheld	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Advice messages should contain a caveat about the timing being an estimate and dependant on the time of year.</li> <li>2. The reasons for withdrawal given on PEGASUS should be revised to ensure that students understand the key points on which the decision to withdraw them from their studies was made.</li> </ol>
Staff Attitude and/or Conduct	Student	Issues with behaviour of Security staff.	Partially Upheld	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Refresher training for staff on cultural diversity.</li> <li>2. Reinforce the requirement for staff to provide details of their name when asked to do so.</li> <li>3. Security staff to be reminded to treat students with respect at all times.</li> </ol>