



University  
of Dundee

# Complaints Handling Procedure

## Annual Report to the SPSO

### 2020/2021

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The University's Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) involves up to two stages for resolution of a complaint - Stage 1 (Frontline) to be handled within 5 working days and Stage 2 (Investigation) to be handled within 20 working days of receiving a complaint. Any person who remains dissatisfied following Stage 2 (Investigation) can take their complaint to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) for consideration. Our CHP can be found at: <http://www.dundee.ac.uk/governance/dca/complaints/>

During 2020/21, the CHP was revised and the University now has the option to resolve a complaint using an alternative complaints resolution approach. This gives the University the option to come to an agreement on a way forward with the complainant without finding an outcome of upheld or not upheld.

This annual report has been approved by the University's Student Governance Oversight Group and also the Senatus Academicus. It contains key performance indicators for the period 1 August 2020 - 31 July 2021.

Previous annual reports along with quarterly statistical information on complaints dealt with by the University can be found on our website at: <http://www.dundee.ac.uk/governance/dca/monitoringstatistics/>

If you have any questions regarding this report, or any other complaint matter, please email the following address: [complaintsresolution@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:complaintsresolution@dundee.ac.uk)

Alternatively, please contact Karen Stulka, Compliance Manager (Student), Legal, [k.f.stulka@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:k.f.stulka@dundee.ac.uk) on (01382) 384011.

## 2. COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

During 2020/21, the University received 105 complaints. Of these, 86 complaints were dealt with at stage 1 (frontline), 16 complaints were dealt with at stage 2 (investigation) and 3 complaints were handled using an alternative complaints resolution approach. From the 16 complaints dealt with at stage 2, 15 complaints had been dealt with initially at stage 1. Charts 1 and 2 show the number of complaints handled each quarter and the percentage of total complaints received at each stage. There is no chart for alternative complaints resolution complaints as this was only started in the period May-July 2021 where we dealt with 3 complaints through facilitated discussions.

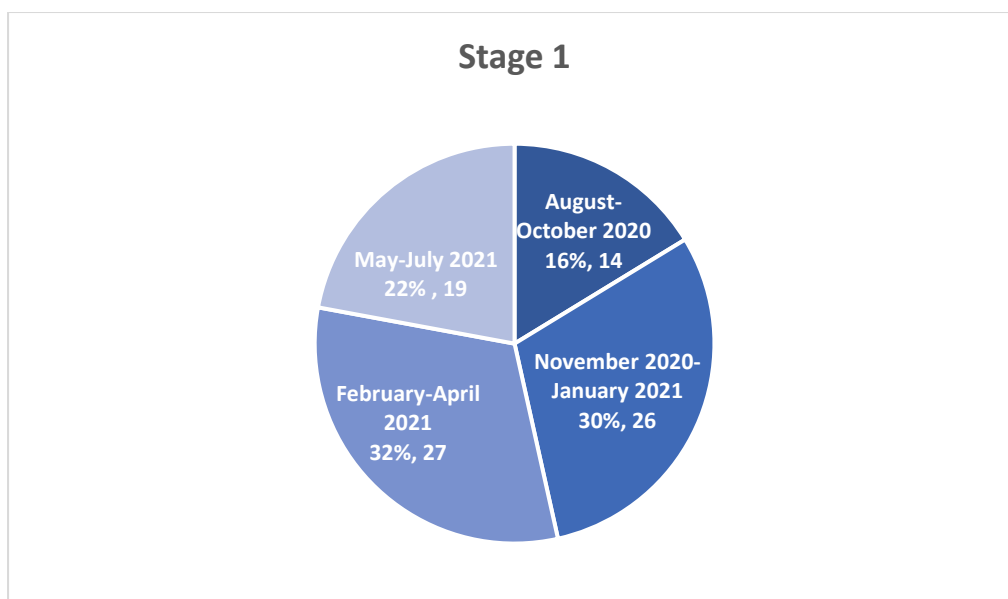


Chart 1 - Quarterly numbers of complaints along with percentage of all stage 1 complaints received

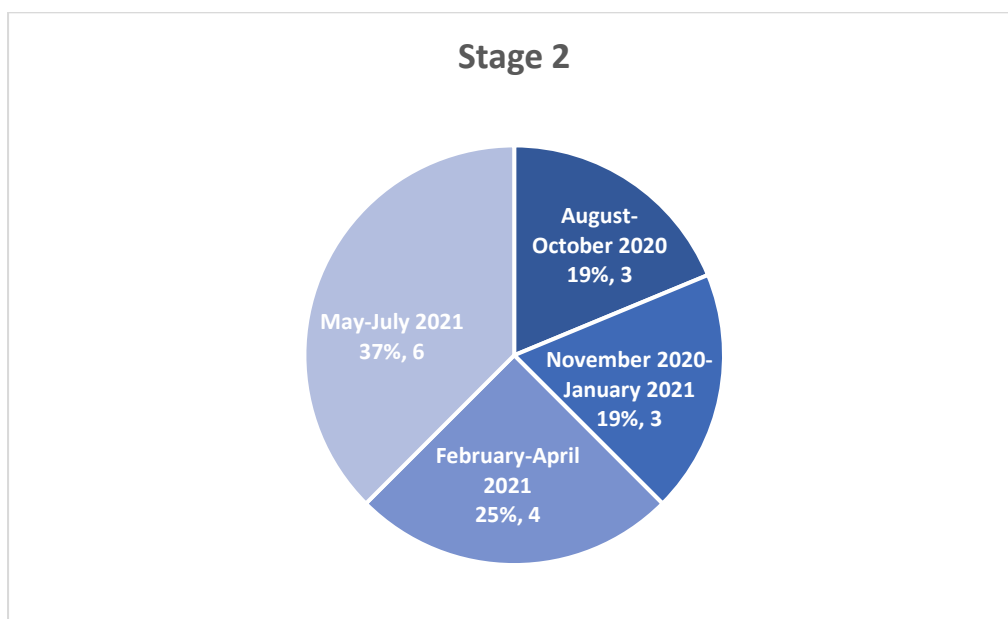


Chart 2 - Quarterly numbers of complaints along with percentage of all stage 2 complaints received

The following table shows the number and percentage of complaints closed at Stage 1 (within 5 working days timescale), Stage 2 (within 20 working days timescale) and through Alternative Complaints Resolution (within 20 working days timescale). However, it should be noted that a total of 74 Stage 1 complaints were closed within 10 working days (86.1%).

Stage	Total complaints	Number closed within SPSO time limits	Percentage closed within SPSO time limits
Stage 1	86	52	60.5% of all stage 1 complaints
Stage 2	16	12	75% of all stage 2 complaints
Alternative Complaints Resolution	3	2	66.6% of all ACR

### 3. AVERAGE TIME TAKEN TO RESOLVE A COMPLAINT



Chart 3 - Average time taken to resolve complaints

Average time periods for both stage 1 and stage 2 complaints have improved since the previous reporting period.

However, there were still some complaints which took longer than the stated SPSO times and these will be addressed in future training sessions. The main reasons for some of the longer times included:

- non-engagement by the complainant or members of staff;
- annual leave or unavailability of staff members due to Covid;
- more complex cases which were more difficult to investigate whilst working from home.

The following table shows the number and percentage of complaints where an extension to the stage 2 working day time limit had been authorised. In these cases, the complaints investigator remained in contact with the complainant. In total we had 4 stage 2 cases which took longer than 20 working days to investigate.

Stage	Number of complaints dealt with where an extension was authorised	Percentage of all stage 2 complaints which took over 20 working days
Stage 2	2	50% of all stage 2 complaints

#### 4. NATURE OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

Chart 4 shows the nature of complaints received at each stage. This year saw a vast increase in the number of stage 1 and stage 2 complaints regarding teaching/assessment. This was mostly due to having to move our teaching online because of the covid pandemic. Service provision and student support complaints also increased during this year. Again, this may be due to no face to face teaching being available and students feeling they did not receive the required level of support through online methods.

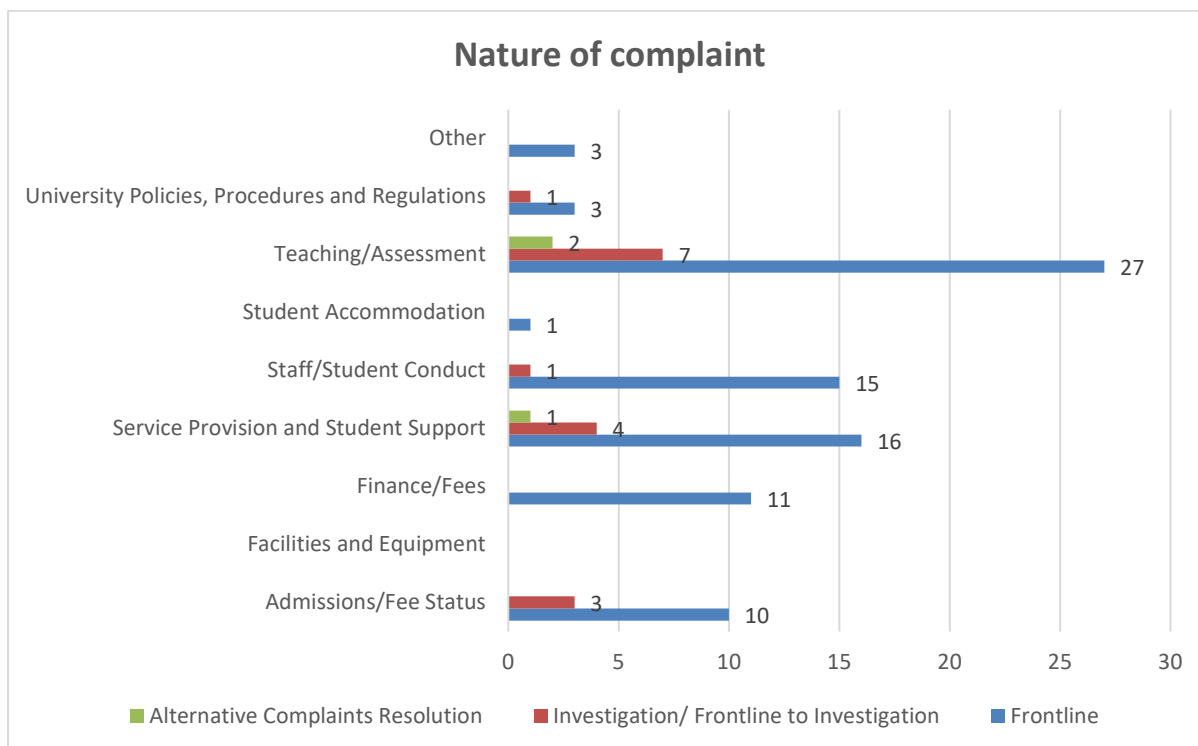


Chart 4 - Nature of complaints dealt with at stage 1 and stage 2

## 5. OUTCOME OF COMPLAINTS

Chart 5 shows the outcome of complaints at each stage. This year saw a change in the way we reported the outcome of complaints following the introduction of the revised CHP in February 2021. Complaints at stage 1 are now recorded as upheld, not upheld, partially upheld or resolved. Because of this change it is not possible to make comparisons with previous years.

However, it was noted that this year saw a large rise in the number of complaints received which were not taken forward under the CHP. As with last year, a large proportion of these cases were where complainants were only looking for a refund of fees. In these cases, an explanation was also given as to why we would not give a refund and an opportunity to speak with someone about their studies was offered.

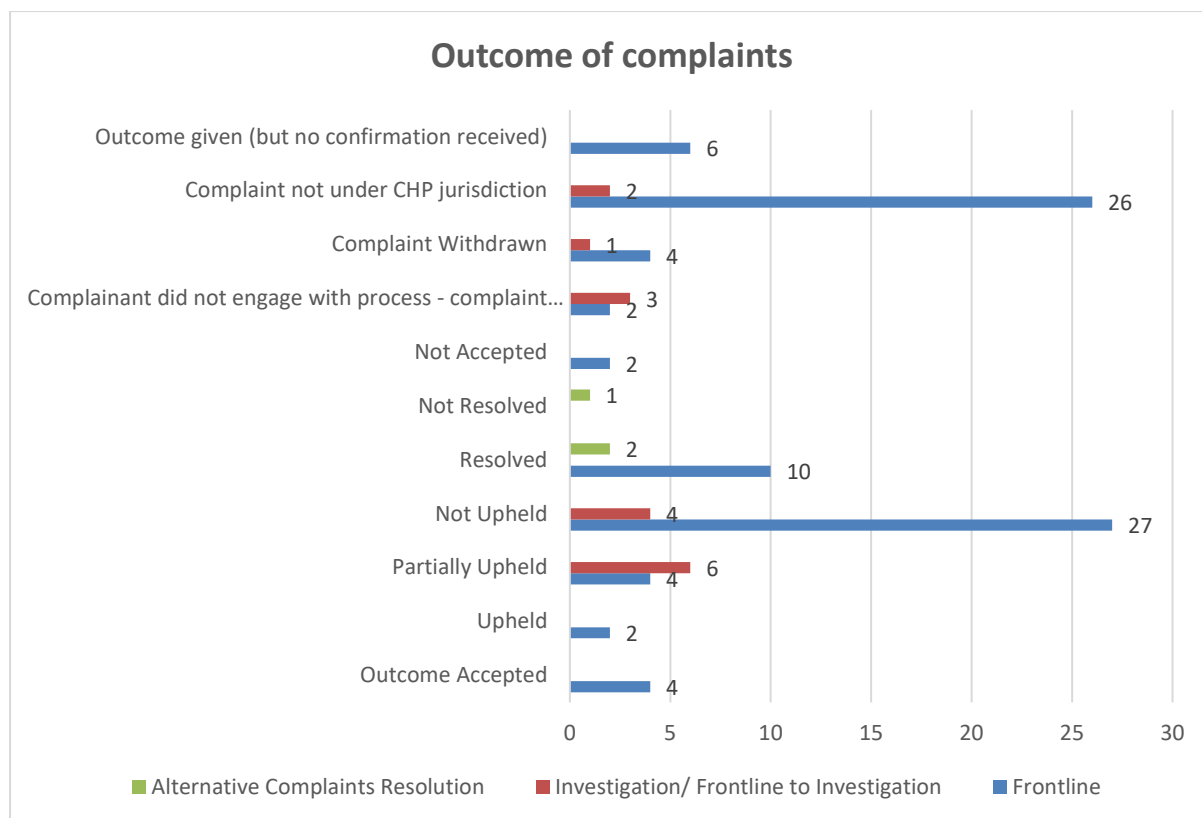


Chart 5 - Outcome of complaints

The following table shows the above data as percentages of the total complaints closed at each stage. Due to rounding of figures the totals may not always add up to 100%.

	<b>Stage 1 - 86 complaints</b>	<b>Stage 2 - 16 complaints</b>	<b>Alternative Complaints Resolution - 3 complaints</b>
Outcome Accepted	4.6%	N/A	N/A
Upheld	2.3%	N/A	N/A
Partially Upheld	4.6%	37.5%	N/A
Not Upheld	31.3%	25%	N/A
Resolved	11.6%	N/A	66.66
Not Resolved	N/A	N/A	33.33
Not Accepted	2.3%	N/A	N/A
Complaint closed (non engagement with process)	2.3%	18.7%	N/A
Withdrawn	4.6%	6.3%	N/A
Complaint not under CHP jurisdiction	30.2%	12.5%	N/A
Outcome given (but no confirmation received from complainant)	6.9%	N/A	N/A

## 6. LESSONS LEARNED

In terms of the University's Vision we are committed to shaping our actions and decisions around a set of core values. These values are critical to our complaints handling process.

During 2020/21 a number of complaints resulted in the University looking at lessons which could be learned. Many of these issues were with regards to communication styles. Some examples included:

You Said	We Did
Policy not clear or understandable	Policy has been reviewed and has been updated so that the language is clear and understandable to all students
Issue with the communication style and language of staff members	Remind staff on how information and advice is conveyed and how this may be misinterpreted
Issues with the attitude of staff during covid when students were using campus buildings	Training given to staff members on how to deal with covid code breaches
Concerns about emails not always being received by staff members in support services	Staff to check junk email folders for correspondence which may be genuine
Issues of lack of timely responses regarding fee status	Look to ensure quick and efficient responses are sent
Students not confident in raising issues in case this impacts on their studies	New advice given through the CHP and other university processes to advise that there will be no detriment to any student making a complaint and it may be a disciplinary offence if staff apply undue influence in the prevention of a complaint

## 7. TRENDS

The chart below shows the number of complaints dealt with at frontline, investigation, ACR and overall since the CHP was introduced in 2013. Headlines this year are:

- 2020/21 saw our highest number of recorded complaints since the CHP was implemented in 2013 with 105 in total.
- As a percentage, the difference between the total complaints recorded in 2019/20 and 2020/21 is a 17% increase.
- This increase in complaint numbers may be due to better awareness raising of complaints due to the introduction of the revised CHP in February 2021. Better reporting by staff may also be a factor in the increased numbers. However, it could also be due to students complaining more due to Covid restrictions and having to deal with teaching moving to online instead of face to face.



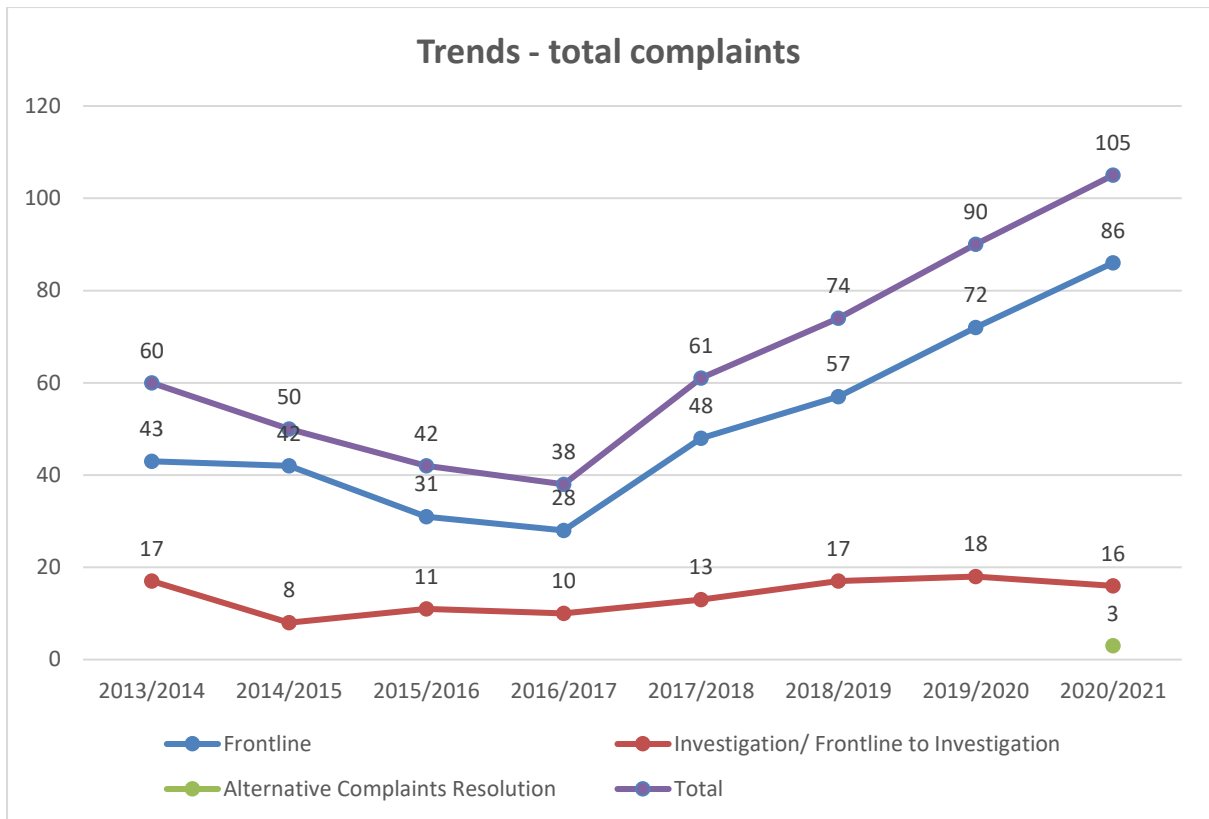


Chart 6 - Trends in number of complaints