

**University of Stirling**

**Complaint Handling 2021-22**

**Introduction**

1. The University operates its complaints handling in line with the Scottish Higher Education Model Complaints Handling Procedure published by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).
2. This report provides a summary of the nature of complaints received from students during the 2021-22 academic year.

**Overview of our Complaints Handling Procedure**

1. The University’s Complaints Handling Procedure involves up to two stages.   
     
   **Stage One – Frontline resolution**   
   Seeks to resolve straightforward complaints swiftly and effectively at the source of the concern or issue.  
     
   **Stage Two – Investigation**Appropriate where a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of frontline resolution, or where frontline resolution is not possible or appropriate due to the complexity or seriousness of the case.
2. These two stages represent the full scope of the University’s complaint procedure. Where a complainant remains dissatisfied at the conclusion of the University’s complaints process, a request can be made to the SPSO for an independent review of the complaint. The SPSO is the final stage for complaints about universities in Scotland.

**Number of Complaints Received**

1. During the 2021-22 academic year the University received a total of 157 Stage One, frontline complaints, and a further 12 Stage Two complaints. There were a further 21 complaints which were referred to alternative University procedures (such as Academic Appeals), and 8 complaints which were withdrawn after work had started on the complaint.
2. The total number of individual complaints handled was therefore **198**

**Student Complaints Timeline**

**Category of Complainant**

1. Of the 198 total complaints received in 2021/22:

* 63 complaints were received from undergraduate students
* 45 complaints were received from postgraduate taught students
* 9 complaints were received from postgraduate research students
* 22 complaints were received by applicants
* 24 complaints were received by parents of students
* 28 complaints were received from members of the public
* 4 complaints were received from members of staff
* 3 complaints received from an unknown source

1. Of the 198 total complaints received, 117 complaints were received from students at the University:

* 19 were received from students in Faculty of Arts and Humanities;
* 16 were received from students in Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport;
* 14 were received from students in Faculty of Natural Sciences;
* 44 were received from students in Faculty of Social Sciences;
* 22 were received from students in Stirling Management School; and
* 2 were received from students in INTO UoS.

**Categories of Complaint**

**Nature of Complaints**

The most common reason for complaints received under the category of ‘Teaching and / or Assessment’ related to strike action during the academic year and the associated issues in teaching modules. This was also the most common complaint reason for the categories of ‘Service Provision’ due to cancelled classes and ‘Fees / Funding Issues’ where refunds were requested due to strike action. Under the complaint category of ‘University policy, procedures and/or administration’, the most common reasons for complaint related to the withdrawal of CAS as well as issues with enrolment.

**Trend Analysis**

1. Over a five-year period, the total number of complaints received has, broadly, increased year on year but particular increases have been apparent in the last three years. A total of 77 and 72 complaints were received in 2017/18 and 2018/19 respectively. In 2019/20, 127 complaints were received, representing an increase of approximately 76% compared to 2018/19. The number of complaints increased by a further 20% to 153 in 2020/21 and then by 29% to 198 2021/22.
2. The below chart demonstrates trending at a category level over the last three years.

**\*These categories were added in 2019/20 session to allow for improved analysis of information in light of COVID-19 pandemic.**

There is no direct correlation between the increase / decrease in the number of overall complaints recorded under each category and the increase in overall complaint numbers year on year. Complaints recorded under the four largest categories for 2021/22, in terms of volume of complaints, all resulted in a spike for 2021/22. Details are as per the above section on Nature of Complaints.

**Outcomes**

1. In terms of the outcomes of the 157 Stage One frontline complaints received from students, 4 were upheld, 4 were partially upheld, 44 were not upheld, and 98 were resolved. At the time of writing this report, there are 7 complaints still under investigation.
2. In terms of the outcome of the 11 Stage Two complaints received from students, 3 were not upheld, 1 was partially upheld, and 7 are being investigated at the time of writing this report.

**Learning from Complaints**

1. As part of the complaints process, the relevant University teams should routinely reflect on the outcomes of complaints and consider any lessons that can be learnt.
2. Where Stage Two investigations identify areas of practice that could be improved or enhanced, recommendations are made within the complaint response, and progressed by the relevant faculty or directorate.
3. On an ongoing basis, complaints are reviewed in order to determine any trends. This report is provided to the Student Experience Committee to support such review and reflection, learning from complaints and using this learning to inform continuing enhancement.