

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Annual Report on Complaints to the University: Academic Session 2019-20

This report covers complaints raised with the University between 1 August 2019 and 31 July 2020. It does not cover staff grievances or student issues covered by other processes such as academic appeals or student conduct.

The University's complaints procedure is based on the Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) for Higher Education issued by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

Further detail on our complaints procedure is available at:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/senateoffice/policies/uniregs/regulations2020-21/feesandgeneral/complaints/reg29/>

Complaints Activity in 2019-20

Like so many other areas of activity, complaint handling has been impacted significantly by the Coronavirus pandemic, and 2019-20 was a difficult year for students, resulting in an increase in complaints:

Complaint Numbers

132 complaints were considered at frontline resolution with 108 of these being closed at this stage. Twenty-four cases were escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2. Fifty-nine cases were investigated under Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure. The number of investigations at Stage 2 received during the reporting period represents an increase from 2018-19.

With approx. 29,000 students, the University received an average of 6 complaints per 1000 students in 2019-20.

Table 1 – Frontline Resolution

Frontline Complaints (Stage 1)	
Complaints considered at Stage 1	132
Resolved at Stage 1	108
Completed within 5 working days*	41%

Table 2 – Complaint Investigations

Stage 2 Complaints (full investigation)	
No. of investigations*	59
No. of investigations completed**	58

Upheld (or Upheld in part)	22
Completed within 20 working days***	7

* Includes frontline complaints referred on to Stage 2.

** 1 of the 59 cases were withdrawn part way through the process or the file was closed, prior to conclusion, as the complainant did not engage with the process.

*** Extensions were granted for all complaints completed beyond the 20 working day timeframe due to complexity of cases and impact of the pandemic.

Table 3: Categories of Complaint at Stages 1 and 2

Complaint Category (complaints may cover multiple categories)		Stage 1	Stage 2
Academic Advising		1	2
Administrative Procedures		17	13
Admissions		8	6
Assessment - arrangements, feedback, changes, guidance		18	13
Communication		11	7
Complaints Handling		0	1
Finance - Fees/Grants/Bursaries/Finance		32	13
Harassment/Bullying/Discrimination		5	15
Non-Teaching Space and Facilities		3	1
Programme/Course Guidance and Information		0	2
Residential Accommodation		8	10
Student Support/Wellbeing		4	11
Teaching Space and Facilities		5	3
Teaching and Supervision		54	23
Other		20	16

Complaints were identified as falling within the above categories. In some cases, complainants considered their complaint to cover more than one issue, so the number of categories identified exceeds the total number of complaints received.

Teaching and supervision, assessment and student support and well-being continue to be the most prevalent areas of complaint, all of which have been significantly impacted by the circumstances faced during 2019-20.

Learning and process improvement

The pattern of complaints can highlight areas in which we need to make changes and improvements to our provision. For example

1. The University has undertaken a fundamental review of provision for students with disabilities.
2. Collaboration with colleagues in Human Resources in cases where there is overlap between the CHP and HR policies and procedures.
3. We have been working with colleagues in Research and Innovation Services to address the support needs for PGR students when they experience difficulties.

Many complaint investigations identified improvements to avoid recurrence of issues raised, and to enhance the University's service provision.

Recommendations are shared with the relevant staff in Colleges, Schools or University Services, so that the information from complaints can be used to inform any consideration of opportunities for improvements or developments. Staff are required to report on progress made.

Complainant Satisfaction

Despite the challenges faced, only 18% of the complainants who raised issues at frontline sought further consideration at Stage 2 after receiving the initial response at Stage 1. This indicates an effective level of frontline resolution and complainant satisfaction with their case.

Eight of the nine 2019-20 complaints referred to the SPSO were determined to have had an appropriate level of investigation by the University of Glasgow, or to be out of jurisdiction. During 2019-20, the SPSO also reached five further decision on cases from 2017-18, and three from 2018-19. Four of these were upheld and three were upheld in part.