



Abertay University

ANNUAL REPORT TO COURT ON COMPLAINTS HANDLING IN SESSION 2016/17

Introduction

This paper provides Court with a report on the handling of complaints by the University in 2016/17.

The Ombudsman requires Scottish universities to report on a variety of Key Performance Indicators, which have been considered in detail by the Scottish Universities' Complaints Forum and also by the Universities' Scotland Secretaries' Group.

The University's Complaints Handling Procedure ("CHP") emphasizes the quick resolution of complaints, at the point nearest to wherever they arise within the University. This is in preference to lengthy investigations. However, some complaints may either commence at the Investigation stage (if complex, time-consuming, or sensitive) or alternatively may proceed to stage 2 investigation after stage 1 frontline resolution (if the complainant is still dissatisfied; in effect as an internal appeal). Under the CHP, there is no automatic progression from stage 1 frontline resolution to stage 2 investigation, although this is possible if a complaint is dissatisfied after completion of stage 1 frontline resolution.

Summary

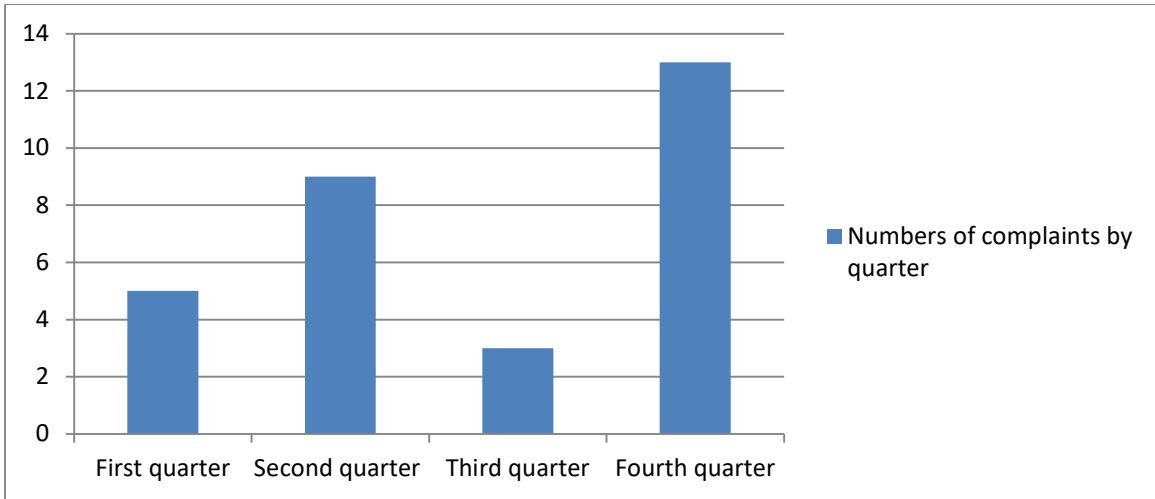
There was an increase in numbers of complaints compared with 2015/16, especially in the fourth quarter. The majority of complaints have been received from students.

As the overall numbers are still relatively low, it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions as to trends. There is a mechanism in place for members of staff to recommend changes to University policies or practices in the light of complaint outcomes. Improvements are suggested regularly where complaints are upheld (and occasionally when they are not), and these improvements are normally accepted by the recipients, and recommendations are then tracked and chased up regularly until completion. The aim is to avoid, wherever possible, recurrences of the same type of complaint, growing a culture of continuous improvement in the University.

Quarter 1 had 5 complaint cases in total, and the average time for completion was affected by frontline and investigation cases which took longer than normal to resolve. Further information on these is provided below, and otherwise, complaints were generally closed within target periods.

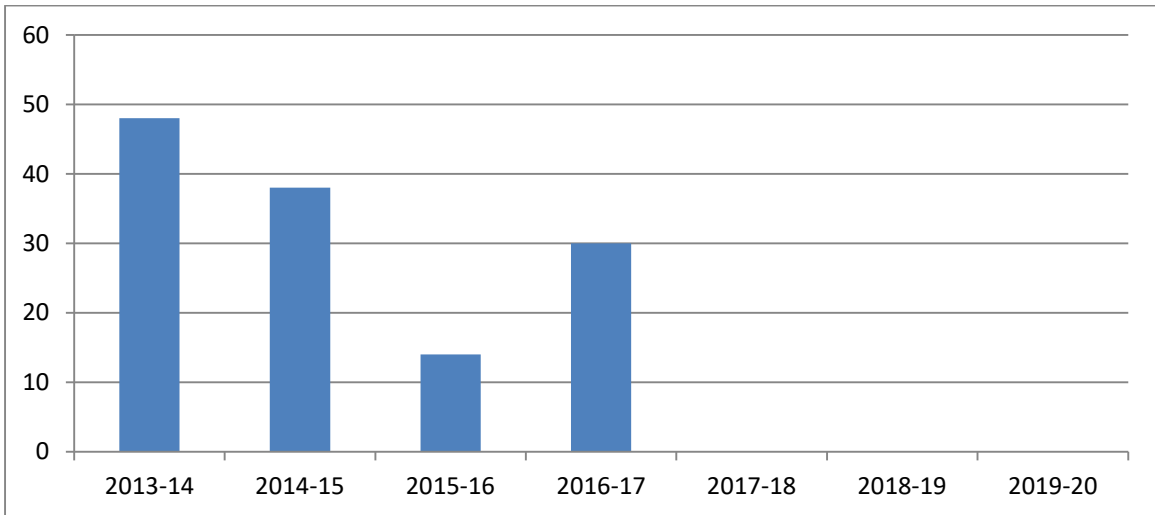
The overall distribution of outcomes for the year was 15 not upheld; 6 upheld fully, and 9 upheld partly (30 total). The top three categories of complaint were University policy, procedures or administration; teaching and/or assessment, and service provision.

Number of complaints recorded in the current year by quarter (totals received):



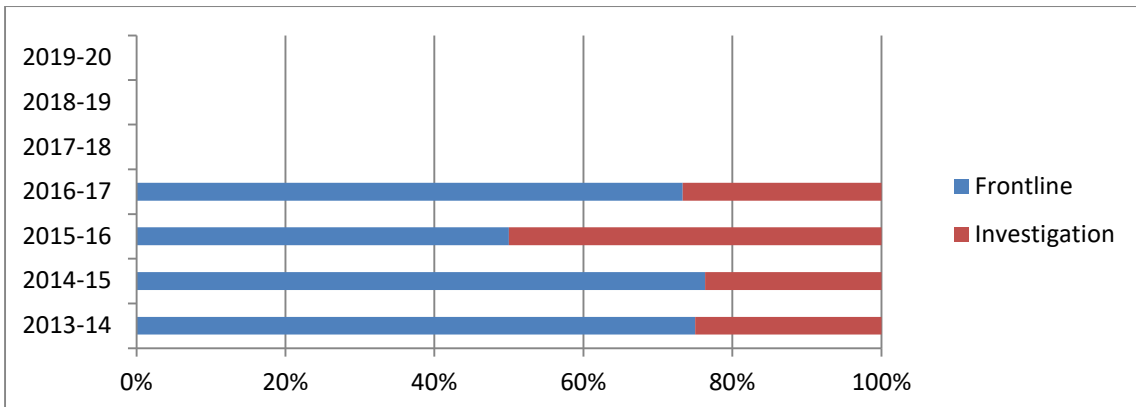
Note: first quarter refers to September – November; second quarter refers to December – February; third quarter refers to March – May, and Fourth quarter refers to June – August.

Total numbers of complaints recorded by academic year (cumulative):



Note: data for the current year are cumulative, updated each quarter, but will not be complete until the complaints year has ended (at the end of August). Prior to Autumn 2013, a different complaints procedure was in operation: data prior to Autumn 2013 are not comparable, and are not shown for that reason.

Frontline or investigation procedure: proportion of total complaints by year (%):

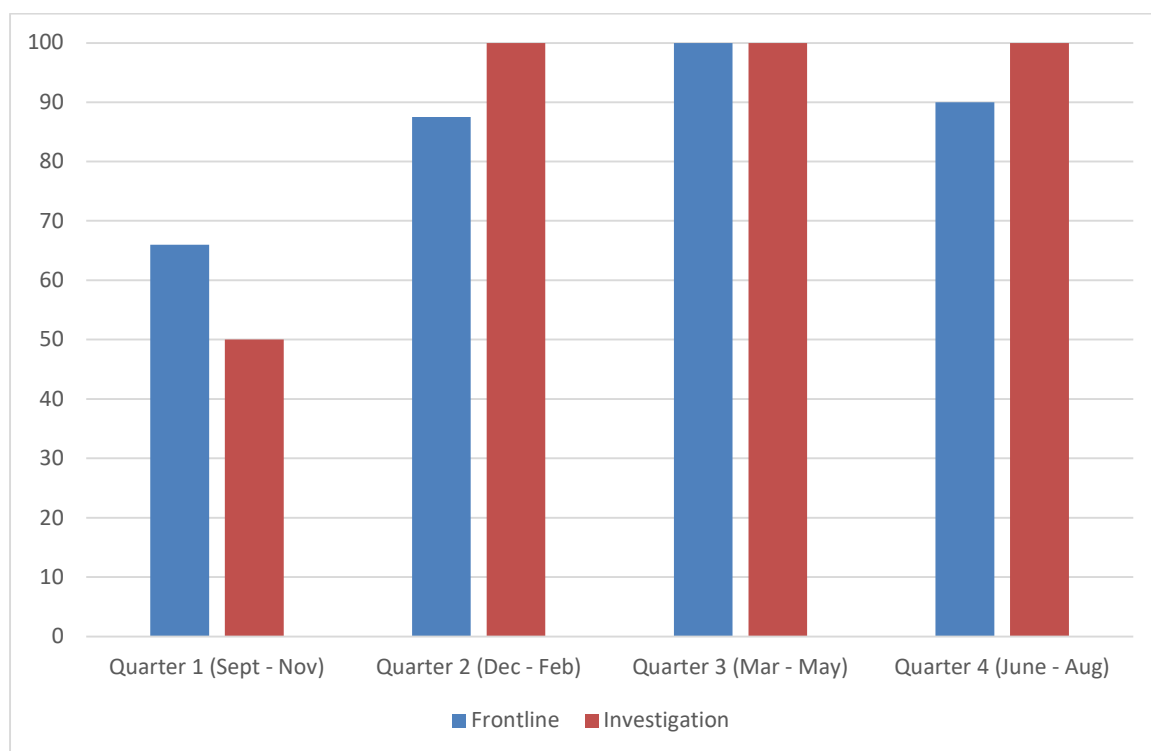


Notes: data are cumulative for the current year (updated each quarter) but will not be complete for the complaints year until the end of the last quarter, in August. Where low numbers are concerned, percentage information can be misleading.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman’s view is that universities should address as many complaints as possible at stage 1 frontline resolution (this is the reason why the above percentages are provided). Frontline resolution is therefore performed wherever possible; this involves the complaint being addressed at the point in the University nearest to where it arose.

However, some complaints are too complex and/or lengthy to be considered as frontline resolution ones within the Ombudsman’s strict 5 working day target time-limit for this category of complaint. Any breach of this deadline requires to be authorised, recorded and reported on, even if the subject matter of the complaint is too lengthy and/or complex to be completed within that time-limit. However, such cases may be dealt with initially as complaint investigations (stage 2), for which a 20 working day target time-limit applies. The University’s CHP envisages that a complaint may commence as an investigation, i.e. at stage 2, where appropriate.

Percentage of all frontline resolution and of all investigations complaints closed within target time-limit (5 and 20 working days respectively): by complaint quarter, for current year.

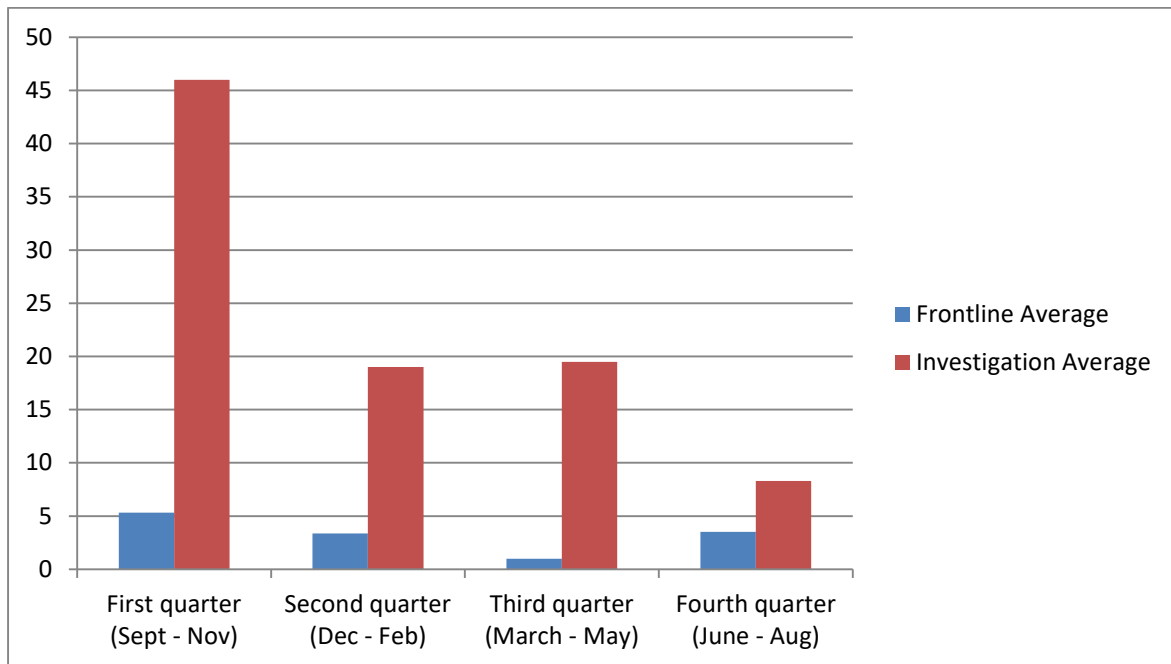


Note: where low numbers are concerned, percentage information is misleading. Complaints arising from members of staff are normally dealt with under the Grievance Procedure operated by HR, so these data are not recorded here.

September – November Q1 data notes: one exceptional and complex investigation case, closed in October, took 73 days in total (due to staff absence during the summer period, and also referral to another, non-complaints, procedure). One frontline case took 12 days, again because of inability to interview relevant staff to ensure that both sides of the complaint were investigated.

Time taken to resolve complaints: average duration (numbers)

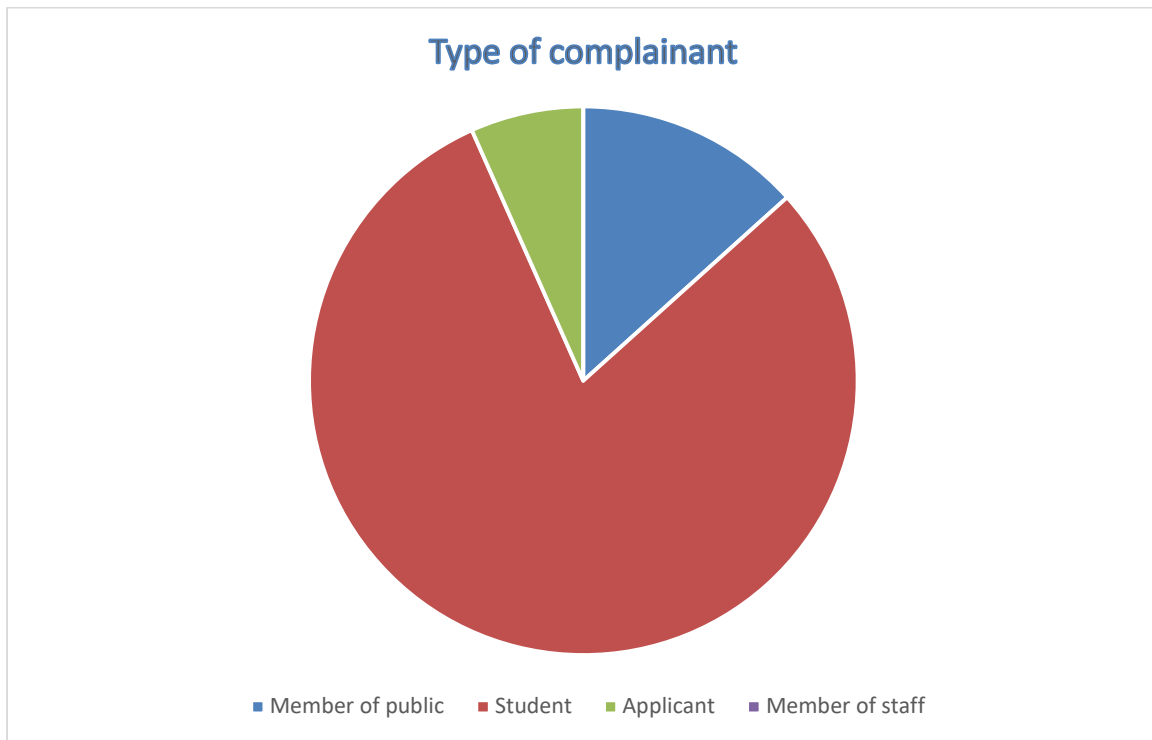
The chart below shows the average length of time to deal with complaints in working days by complaint quarter.



The targets for dealing with complaints set down by the SPSO are 5 working days for Frontline Resolution and 20 working days for Complaint Investigation cases, which by nature are more complex.

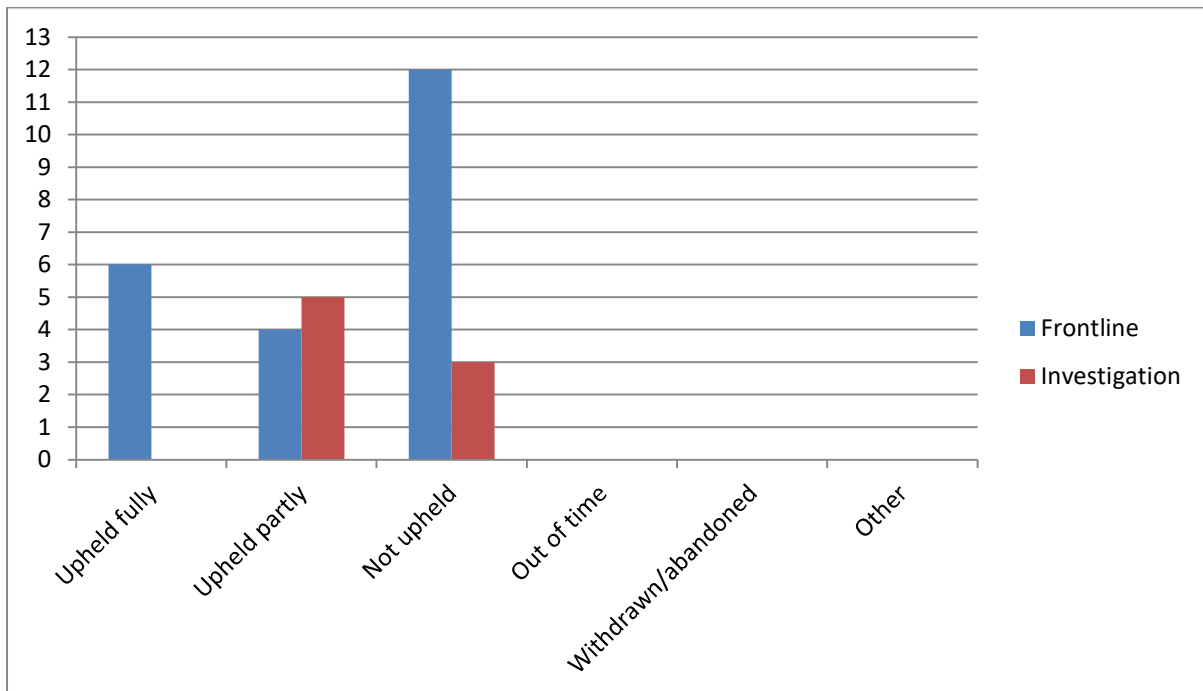
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Type of complainant for current year to date (cumulative):



Notes: data are cumulative for the current year (updated each quarter) but will not be complete for the complaints year until the end of the last quarter, in August. Where low numbers are concerned, percentage information is misleading.

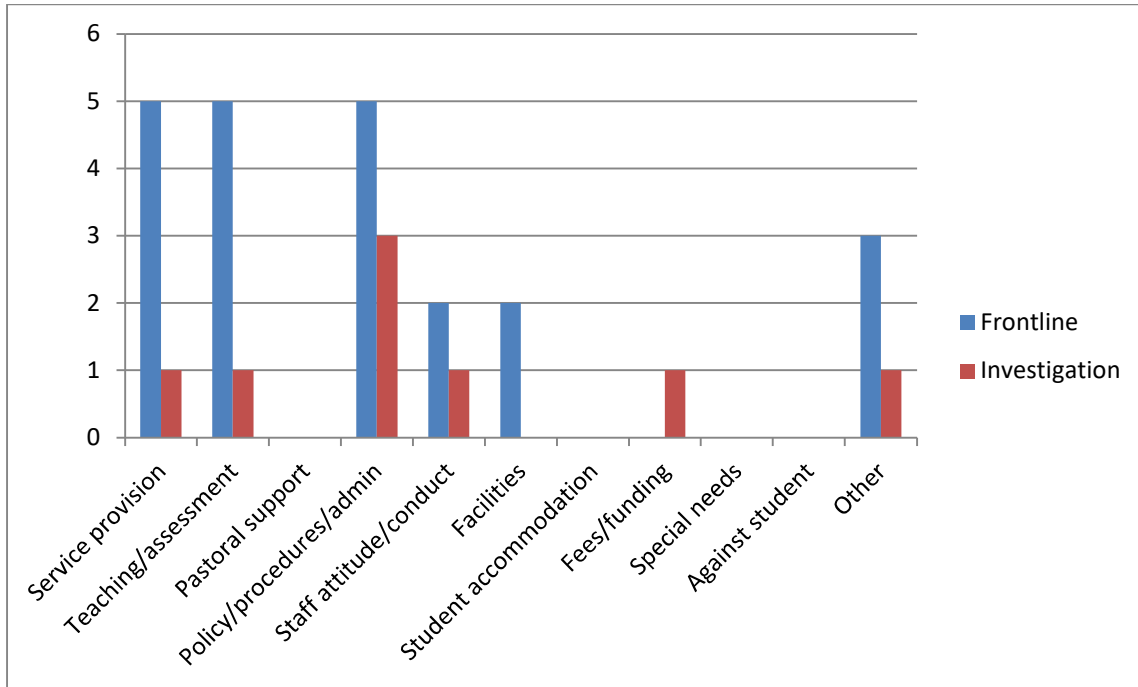
Outcomes of complaints for current year to date (cumulative; numbers):



Notes: data are cumulative for the current year (updated each quarter) but will not be complete for the complaints year until the end of the last quarter, in August. 'Other' includes referral to another

procedure (e.g. disciplinary' grievance, etc) or to another organisation (if applicable), or other resolution (e.g. mediation).

Category of the complaints made in the current year to date by frontline or investigation (cumulative; numbers).



Notes: data are cumulative for the current year (updated each quarter) but will not be complete for the complaints year until the end of the last quarter, in August. Note: "other" includes complaints about University policy decisions