

## **Royal Conservatoire of Scotland: Annual Complaints Report 2020-21**

### **Background**

The Higher Education Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP), which was developed in consultation with key stakeholders including Universities Scotland and complaints experts from the sector, was first implemented in August 2013 and updated following an SPSO review in 2018-19. The revised MCHP was applied at the start of AY2020-21.

The Conservatoire's Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) is operated in line with the statutory requirements of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) and is available at <https://www.rcs.ac.uk/complaints/>

**Stage 1 Frontline Resolution** seeks to resolve straightforward complaints swiftly and effectively at the point at which the complaint is made, or as close to that point as possible.

**Stage 2 Investigation** is appropriate where a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of a frontline resolution, or where this is not an appropriate route due to the complexity or seriousness of the individual case.

### **Recording and Reporting**

The Conservatoire records all complaints and reports quarterly to senior management and annually to the Academic Board and Board of Governors on key performance information, in accordance with SPSO requirements.

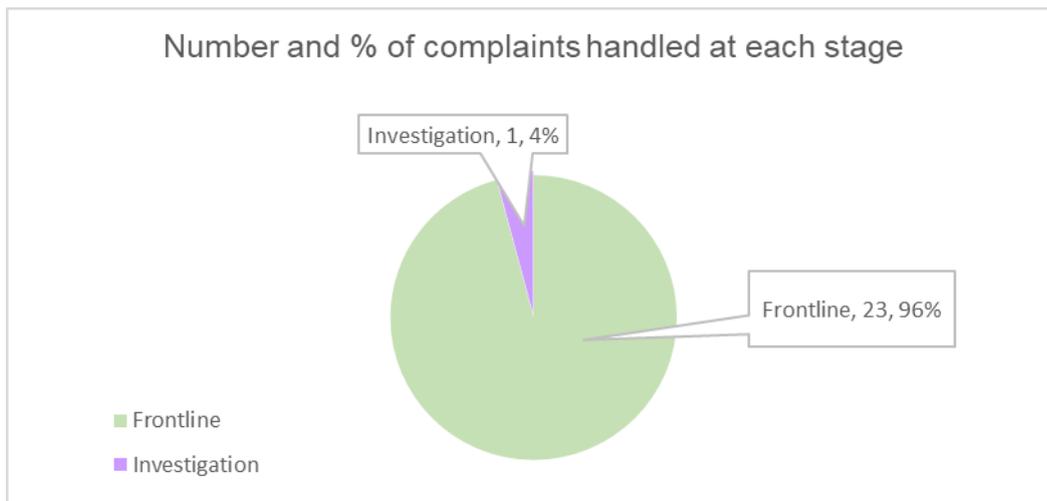
### **Analysis**

24 complaints were recorded across all departments in RCS during the period 1 September 2020 to 31 August 2021. Of this number, 8 were resolved (where the institution and complainant agree what action (if any) will be taken to provide full and final resolution without making a decision about whether the complaint is upheld or not upheld) 3 upheld, 3 partially upheld and 9 were not upheld. One complaint was escalated to stage 2 investigation.

<b>Total number of complaints received</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Stage 1: Frontline</b>	<b>23</b>
Number of complaints resolved at Stage 1	20
Number of complaints resolved within the 5 working days timeline	12
Number of complaints where an extension to the timeline has been authorised	10
Number of complaints escalated to Stage 2 Investigation	3
Number of complaints resolved	8
Number of complaints upheld	2
Number of complaints not upheld	9
Number of complaints partially upheld	3
Number of complaints withdrawn	1
<b>Stage 2: Investigation</b>	<b>1*</b>
Number of complaints resolved at Stage 2	1
Number of complaints resolved within the 20 working days timeline	1
Number of complaints where an extension to the timeline has been authorised	0
Number of complaints resolved	0
Number of complaints upheld	1
Number of complaints not upheld	0
Number of complaints partially upheld	0
Number of complaints withdrawn	0

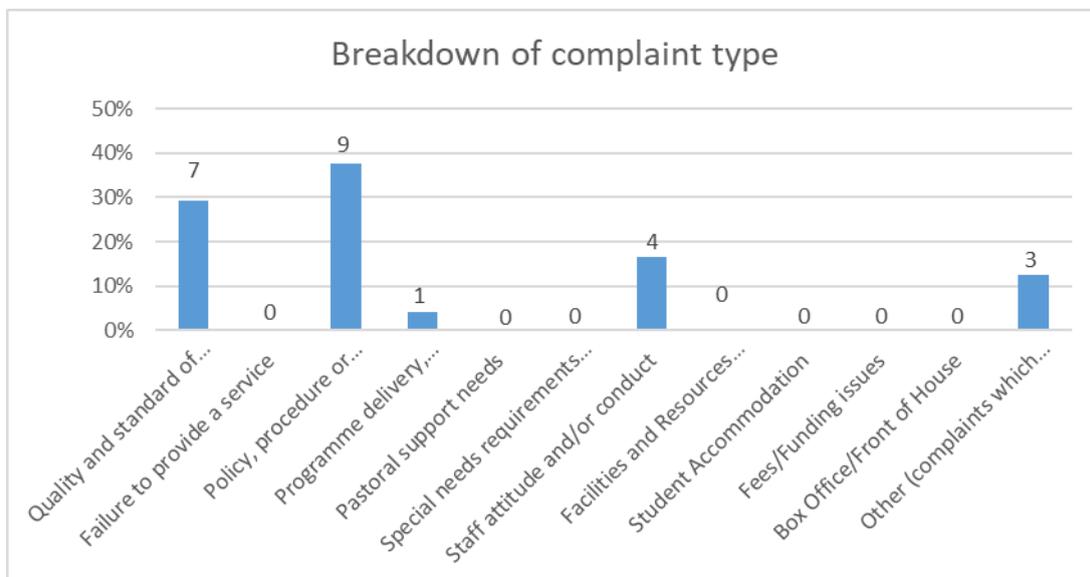
\* Frontline complaints referred on to Stage 2

**Number of complaints considered at Stage 1 and Stage 2:**



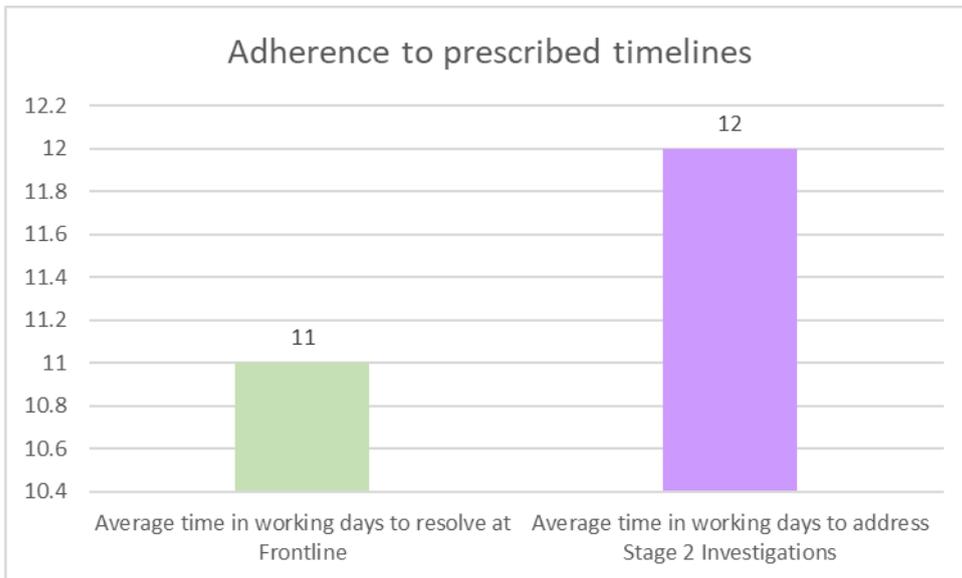
Session 2019-20 saw a slight increase in the total number of complaints received in comparison to the previous year: up from 22 in AY2019-20 to 24 last year. Frontline complaints also increased from 18 last year to 23, the majority of which (74%) were either resolved or not upheld. There was a decrease in Stage 2 investigations undertaken this year with only one case escalated from the Frontline at the request of a complainant, dissatisfied with the Stage 1 outcome. A further 2 complaints are currently being investigated and will be reporting on in the first quarter report to senior management due at the end of November.

The following bar chart provides a summary of complaints for the reporting period by category type:



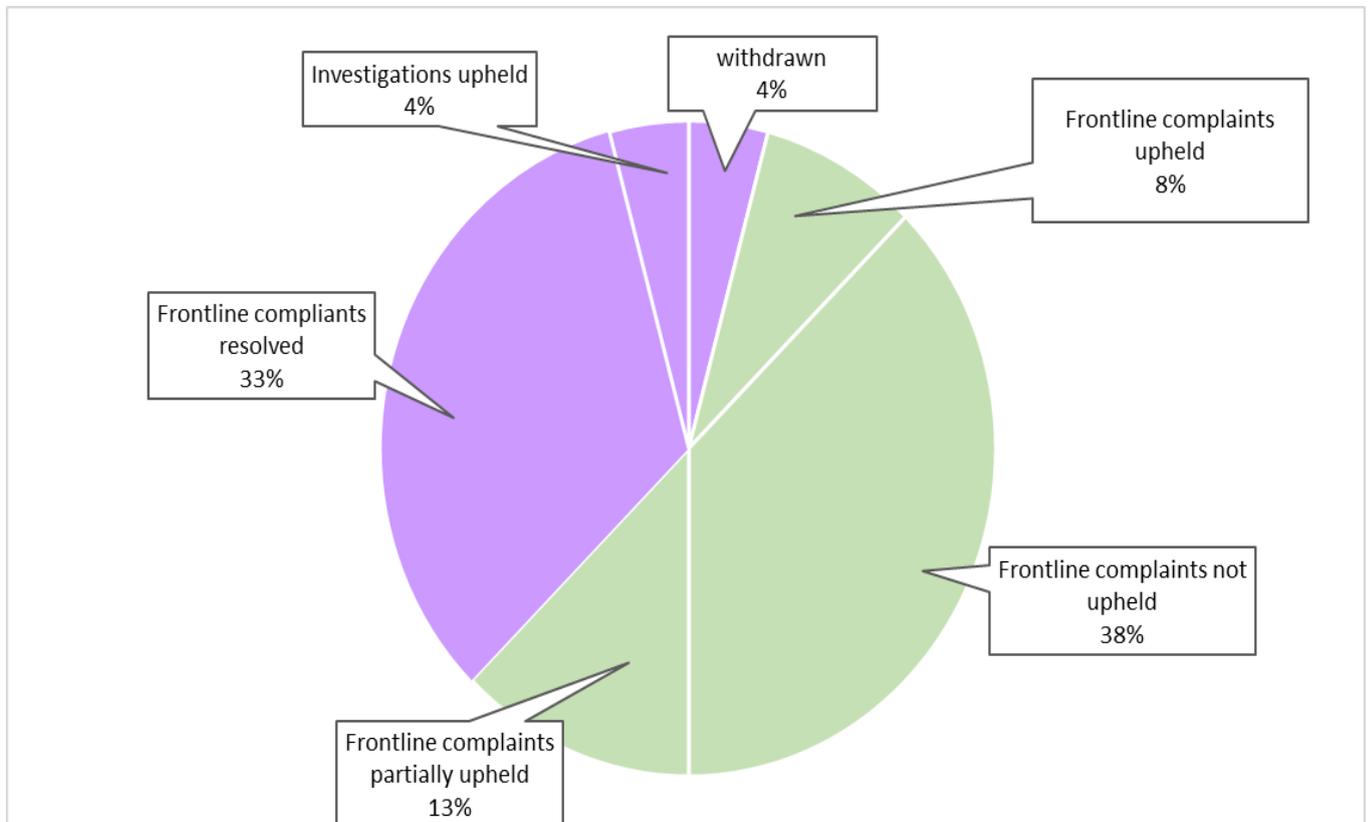
**Complaint Response Times and Adherence to timelines:**

52% of complaints received at Frontline were completed within the prescribed timelines.



The CHP allows for extension, in consultation with the complainant, where it is deemed necessary to increase the possibility of resolving the matter. Where extensions were applied, predominantly to accommodate staff availability, leave entitlement or because complaints were received during vacation periods, this afforded the additional time necessary to give due attention to the concerns raised and in the interests of reaching a satisfactory resolution for both parties.

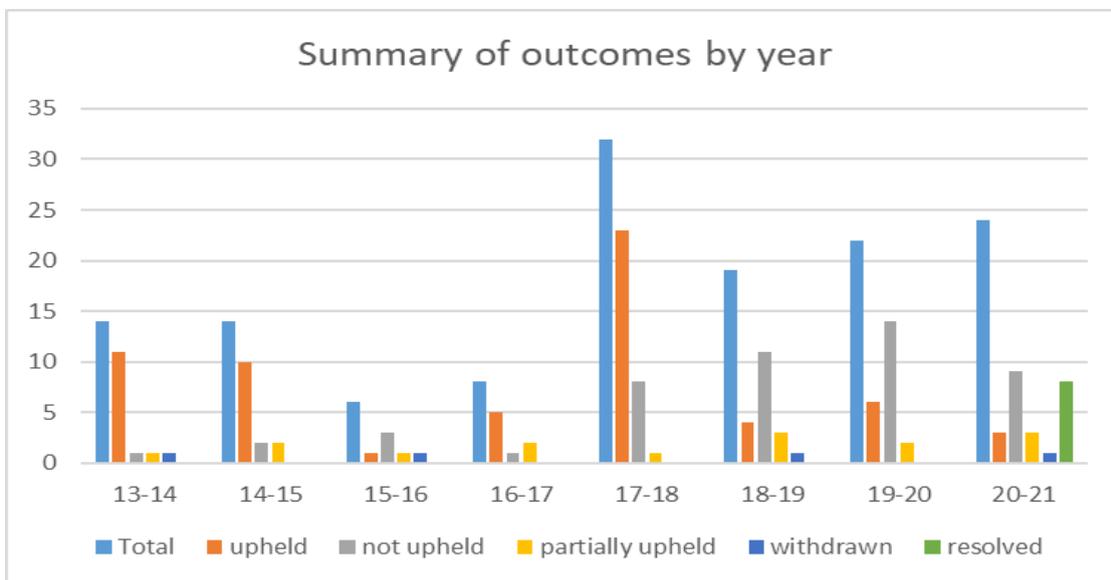
**Summary of complaint outcomes:**

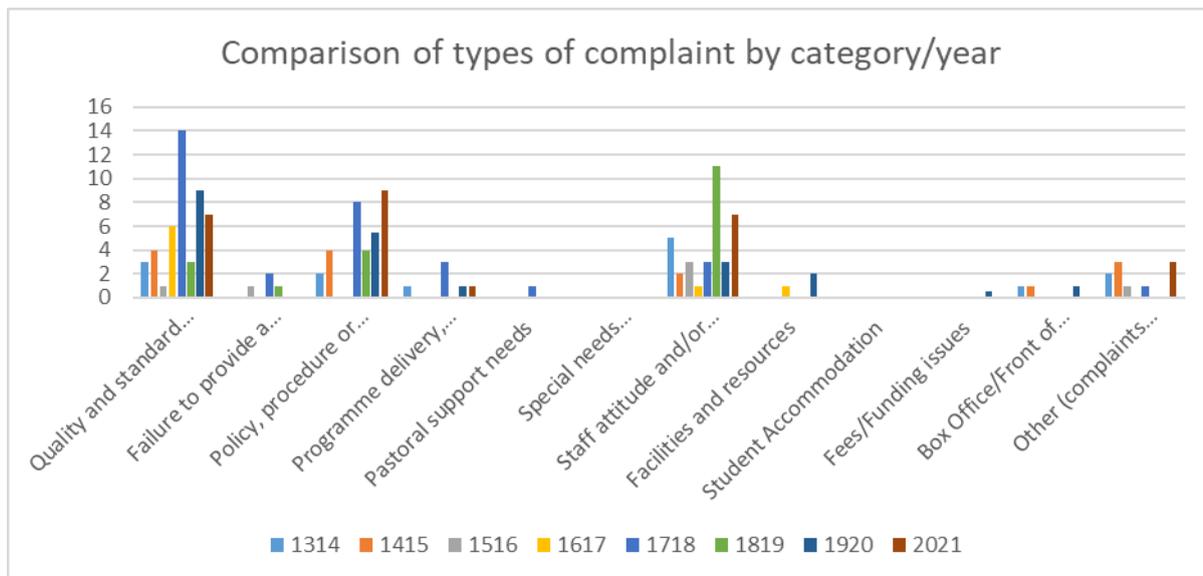


**Trends**

Once again it has been possible for staff to find satisfactory resolutions to the majority of complaints received during this year and it remains our aim to support staff to 'get it right first time' with a focus on resolving complaints at the Frontline wherever possible and emphasis on the importance on valuing and learning from complaints. Colleagues are acquiring a better understanding of dealing with complaints quickly and effectively and we continue to promote the view that all complaint investigation presents an opportunity to reflect and implement service improvements. Actions taken in response to complaint handling this year and learning points and recommendations for improvement are listed below.

	Total	Frontline (Stage 1)	Investigation (Stage 2)
<b>2013-14</b>	14	10	4
<b>2014-15</b>	14	12	2
<b>2015-16</b>	6	4	2
<b>2016-17</b>	8	7	1
<b>2017-18</b>	32	31	1
<b>2018-19</b>	19	12	7
<b>2019-20</b>	22	18	4
<b>2020-21</b>	24	23	1





As last year, the majority of complaints received during AY2021 concerned policy, procedure and administrative processes and quality and standard of service provision (67%) and 46% of the complaints across these two categories were either only partially or not upheld. Complaints related to staff attitude and/or conduct (4) were up one from last year. One was upheld, two resolved and one, that had a not upheld outcome after Frontline review is currently being escalated as a Stage 2 investigation.

Only three (12%) of the complaints received during this reporting period made reference to, were in some way related to delivery moving online as a result of the pandemic and for one complainant it was agreed that outstanding tuition fees would not be pursued

### **Actions taken/Lessons learned**

Service improvements made and action taken as a result of dealing with issues raised through the complaints process during AY2020-21 included:

- specific issues highlighted in a complaint following an advice audition were to be addressed through internal processes with appropriate staff training provided for the member of staff concerned
- One ShortCourses parent was given the option of withdrawing their child from classes temporarily if they were able to access face-to-face teacher locally and given an assurance that a re-audition would not be required to return to studies
- The institution recognised and would re-emphasise the importance of GDPR legislation and its application both during and post-employment and studies
- The Junior Conservatoire student handbook was updated to include procedures for changing a teacher and highlight that a four week notice period was required
- The Recruitment and Admissions department was asked to revise feedback text to state that a performance was 'not yet at the standard required for entry to the programme'. Additionally, to revise the tone of accompanying emails from the feedback inbox to ensure that the same high standards of care for mental wellbeing, expected in RCS programmes of study, is maintained throughout the auditions and outcome notification process
- The Recruitment and Admissions department committed to reviewing its internal processes for updating outcomes via UCAS Conservatoires
- Production staff were reminded of their obligations as outlined in the Dignity at Work and Study statement when contracted to RCS and it was noted that this should be reinforced as part of the appointment process for all freelance staff

- The Conservatoire's commitment to embracing diversity and inclusivity was highlighted this quarter through the complaints process and this evolving area of policy should be continuously monitored to ensure that policies and practices align closely with those across the HE and pre-HE sectors in Scotland
- The Human Resources department agreed to review contractual processes to ensure that the potential for delay related to ID checks and the signing of contracts is minimised and would work with departments to facilitate the issuing of contracts prior to any work taking place.
- The Director of Music agreed to follow up with the incoming Academic Registrar to ensure that a mechanism was in place to capture and facilitate 1:1 lessons when offered outwith the normal application process, e.g. as part of a package of benefits to a member of the Students' union.