

Royal Conservatoire of Scotland: Annual Complaints Report 2023-24

Background

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.

To protect personal information and individual identification, this data is presented using rounding methodology, including:

1. All numbers are rounded to the nearest multiple of 5
2. Any number lower than 2.5 is rounded to 0
3. Halves are always rounded up (e.g. 2.5 is rounded to 5)
4. Percentages based on fewer than 5 individuals are suppressed
5. Averages based on 5 or fewer individuals are suppressed

Analysis

Number of complaints:

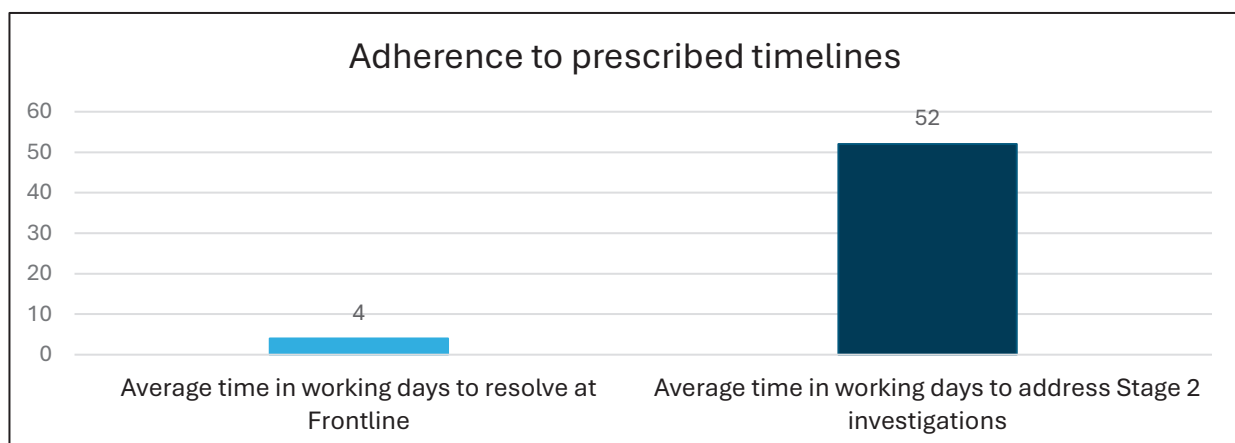
A total of 10 complaints were recorded across RCS during the period 1 September 2023 to 31 August 2024.

Total number of complaints received	10
Stage 1: Frontline	5
Number of complaints closed at Stage 1	0
Number of complaints closed within the 5 working days timeline	0
Number of complaints where an extension to the timeline has been authorised	0
Number of complaints escalated to Stage 2 Investigation	0
Number of complaints resolved	0
Number of complaints upheld	0
Number of complaints not upheld	0
Number of complaints partially upheld	0
Number of complaints withdrawn	0
Stage 2: Investigation	5
Number of complaints resolved at Stage 2	5
Number of complaints resolved within the 20 working days timeline	0
Number of complaints where an extension to the timeline has been authorised	5
Number of complaints resolved	0
Number of complaints upheld	0
Number of complaints not upheld	0
Number of complaints partially upheld	0
Number of complaints withdrawn	0

Adherence to prescribed timelines:

The CHP allows 5 working days to respond a Frontline Response (or up to a total of 10 working days where a timeline extension is granted). 20 working days are allowed to address a Stage 2 Investigation, although extensions may be granted in exceptional circumstances.

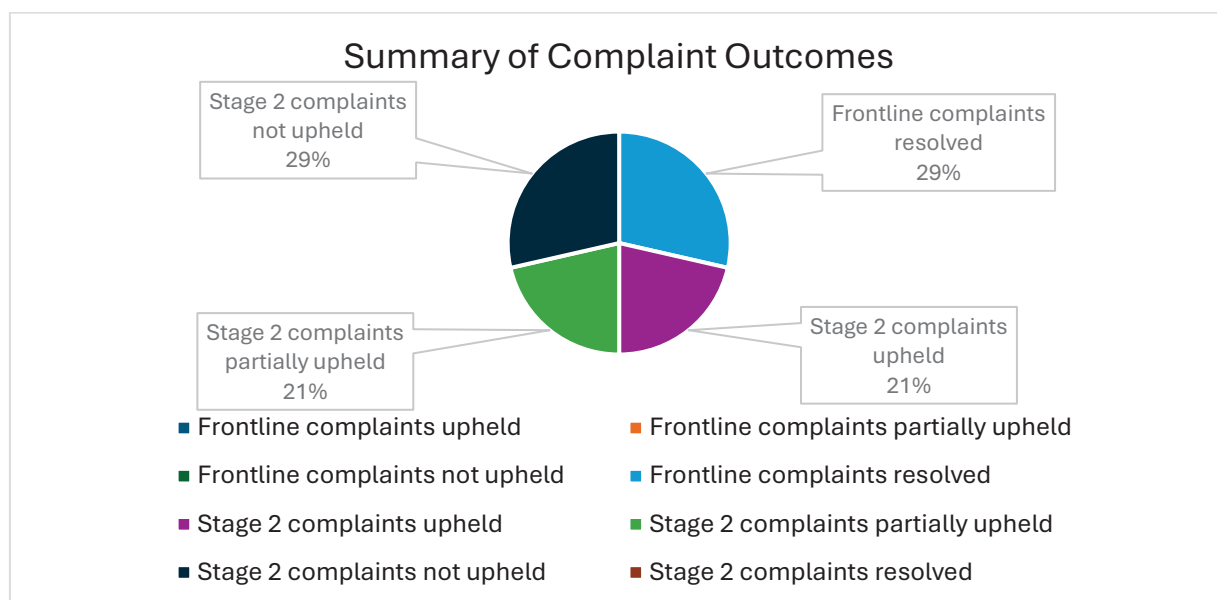
50% of Frontline Responses were closed within the prescribed timeline. No Stage 2 investigations were closed within this time.



The CHP allows for extension, in consultation with the complainant, where it is deemed necessary to increase the possibility of resolving the matter. Extensions were applied partly due to a lack of communication from Complainants making it difficult to progress with the investigations, and partly to accommodate staff availability, leave entitlement or because complaints were received over the summer vacation period. 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:

22% 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), 17% upheld, 17% partially upheld, 22% were not upheld. In a small number of cases, the complaint was withdrawn before the investigation was initiated. In another small number of cases, an outcome has not yet been reached.

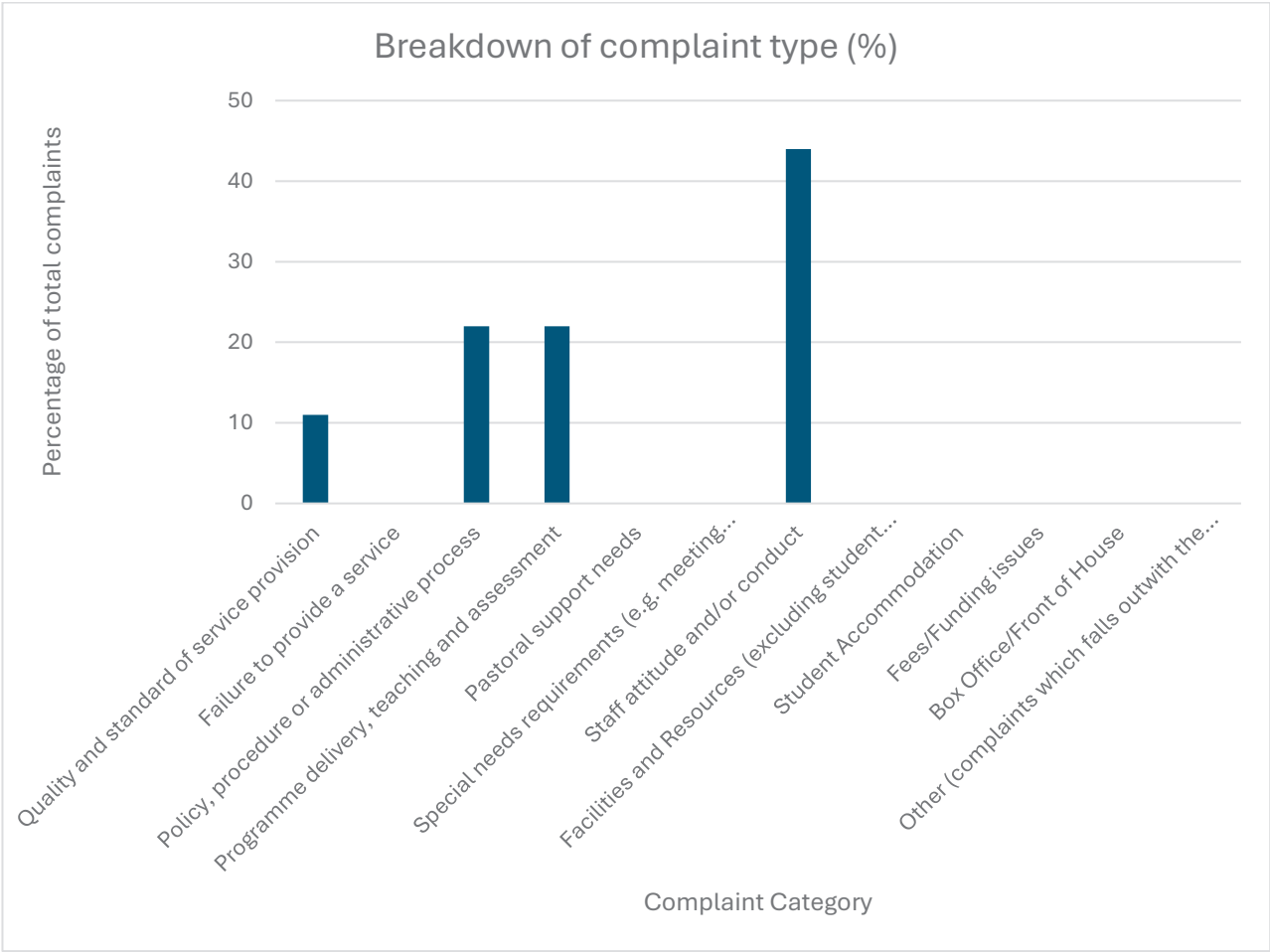


We continue to promote the view that all complaint investigations provide an opportunity for valuable reflection. The appointment of a Student Community Conduct Officer this year to oversee this area has resulted in the introduction of quarterly and annual action plans to further enhance our service. Service improvements are introduced when identified and communicated to all relevant parties. The actions taken in response to complaint handling this year and learning points and recommendations for improvement are listed at the end of this report.

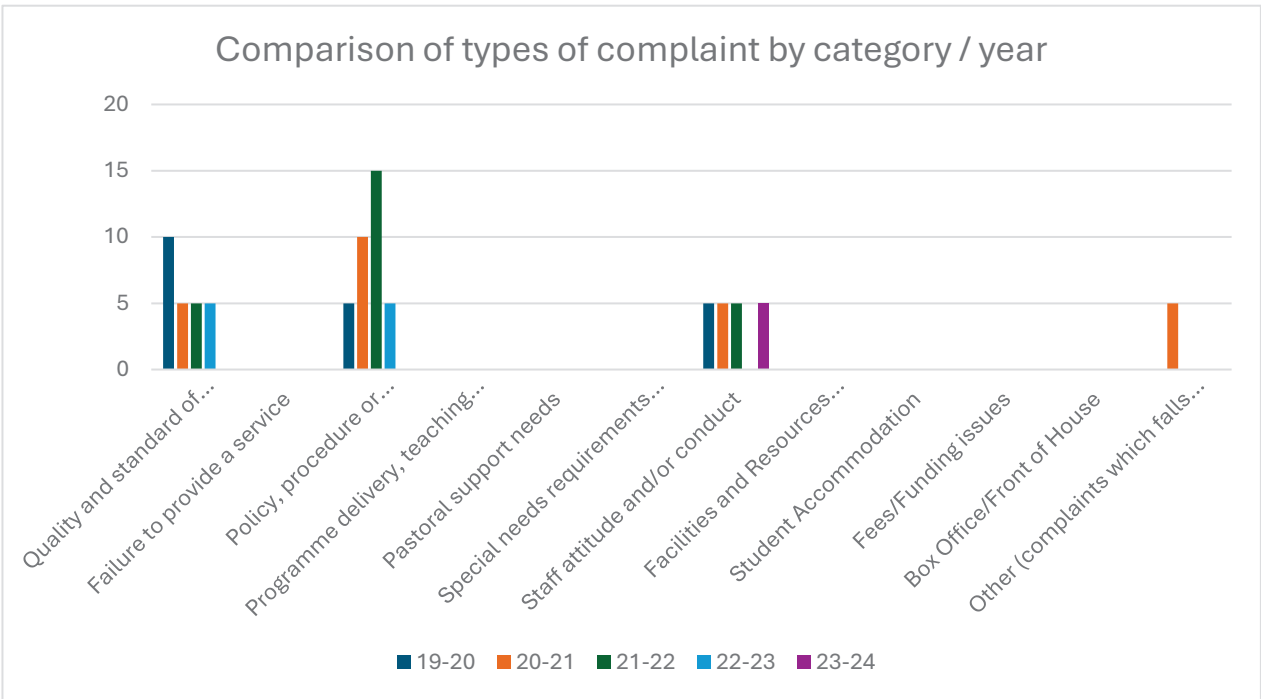
The total number of complaints received during the 23-24 academic year was the lowest in the past 5 years. While the number of complaints was comparatively low, a higher proportion of complaints were handled as Stage 2 investigations. This indicates that complaints were more complex in nature compared to previous years.

	Total	Frontline (Stage 1)	Investigation (Stage 2)
2019-20	20	15	5
2020-21	25	25	0
2021-22	25	20	5
2022-23	15	15	0
2023-24	10	0	5

Complaints concerned four main categories: staff attitude and conduct (45%), policy, procedure, or administrative process (22%), programme delivery, teaching and assessment (22%), and the quality and standard of service provision (11%).



The number of complaints in each category is similar to that of previous years, with quality and standard of service provision, policy, procedure and administrative process, and staff conduct receiving the most overall complaints.



This year, where there had been failings in procedural or administrative processes due to human error, staff were able to respond quickly to resolve and rectify the mistake.

Where concerns were raised about the quality of service, root causes were identified, and learnings were actioned to make any possible service improvements.

Where concerns related to programme delivery, teaching and assessment, recommendations were made with the view of resolving these issues with the complainant.

Complaints about staff attitude and/or conduct have doubled this year compared to last year. 45% of complaints this year related to staff conduct, whereas 15% of last year's complaints related to the same. These complaints represented ongoing and escalating concerns rather than emerging concerns. Learnings focused on the awareness and implementation of frontline resolutions at an earlier stage and supporting staff and students to make best use of these processes.

Actions taken/Lessons learned:

Actions taken this year as a result of the learnings identified in the 22-23 annual complaint report are included in the table below.

Actions or Learnings Identified	Department	Staff Responsible	Update
RCS Junior's will review how email inboxes are monitored in order to improve response time	Junior	Head of Junior Conservatoire	Emails are now reviewed and colour coded for the attention of appropriate staff.
A clear protocol is required that will support the BASE accommodation complaints process	BASE	Operations Manager, Base	Monthly meetings are now set up between the OM at Base and student wellbeing and complaints handling teams. Manager has since left her role at BASE and a new manager has started in role. These meetings will continue with the new OM.
Programme handbooks will be revised to better articulate the negotiation process and provide access for graduating students to future steps	MMus / MA Vocal	Head of MMus Programme	Review and revision of relevant sections of programme handbooks carried out. Sep 2023.
Additional quality checks will be introduced when converting information from auditions into offers	AAS	Senior International Recruitment Lead and Assistant Registrar, Recruitment and Admissions	All offers are checked before being sent – New staff in role and previous issues were a result of human error.
RCS Junior's will review and publish updated eligibility criteria for its competitions	Junior	Head of Junior Conservatoire DDPF	In progress.

Service improvements made and action to be taken as a result of dealing with issues raised through the CHP during AY2023-24 include:

- Update the website and department handbook to accurately reflect the frequency of taught classes on MMus programmes
- Adapt application process for MMus courses to better match candidate experience and preferences with course demands
- Raise awareness of correct complaint reporting procedures and ensure staff know when and how to signpost students
- Review methods of frontline resolutions for staff-student conflict to support student and staff wellbeing
- Gesture of goodwill refund for classes not yet delivered at the point that the complainant decided to withdraw from a course
- Staff to clearly communicate with the cohort the activities of the year ahead, including availability for coaching and points of in-person contact throughout the year, including masterclasses, rehearsals, dress-rehearsals and performances.
- Any period of absence by staff, whether for recruitment or illness, should be clearly communicated to the cohort.
- Staff to provide clarity on roles and responsibilities for any student-led activities.
- Staff to provide structured, in-person points of contact throughout the year with the cohort or individuals requesting meetings.
- A written document detailing the RCS auditions process, as it relates to NBS (Northern Ballet School) and any other similar organisations, to be produced and used with NBS students and staff