

Quality Assurance Committee

Academic Appeals and Complaints Handling Update (2024/25)

Date of Meeting: [18/02/2026]

1. Purpose of the Paper

- 1.1 This paper will provide members of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) with an update on academic appeal and complaint handling across the University.
- 1.2 This paper contains detailed data on appeal and complaint submissions (appendices A and B refer) received prior to and during the 2024/25 academic year, in addition to an analysis of emerging trends.
- 1.3 Members of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) are asked to discuss the paper (and associated appendices).

2. Previous Consideration by / Further Approval Required

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by		
Further consideration/ approval required by	Student Support & Experience Committee (SSEC)	[12/02/2026]
	Quality Assurance Committee (QAC)	[18/02/2026]
	University Education Committee (UEC)	[24/02/2026]
	Senior Management Team (SMT)	TBC

3. Recommended Action

- 3.1 The **Quality Assurance Committee (QAC)** is invited to **discuss** the paper, in particular the data outlined in *Appendices A and B*.

4. Discussion

- 4.1 The University has in place a [Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals](#), and a [Complaints Handling Procedure](#) (CHP), providing frameworks for students (or other

parties, as appropriate) to formalise any concerns they may have about aspects of their academic or non-academic experience. The purpose of this paper is to provide an update on the use of these policies in practice.

5. Academic Appeals

5.1 INTRODUCTION

5.1.1 The Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals was approved by the University Senate and the University Court in February 2011, and most recently revised in June 2024. The Policy is designed to seek appropriate, early resolution and aimed to be accessible, fair, user-focused, confidential, timely, clear, and simple. The Policy includes appeals against the outcome of disciplinary hearings under the Code of Practice on Student Discipline ([Academic](#) and [Non-Academic](#)), decisions taken by the Students’ Progress Committee under the [policy on Undergraduate Student Progress](#), and decisions taken under the [policy on Fitness to Practise](#). The current version of the Appeals Policy is available on the University’s webpages for [staff](#) and [students](#).

5.1.2 Academic Year 2024/25 is the first year where data is available for cases progressed under the revised Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals. The revised policy introduced a test for competency where ‘Part A’ appeals were submitted, reducing the overall number of cases progressed to Schools for investigation. This marked a significant change from the previous policy where all cases, if they were in time, were progressed. The data contained within *Appendix A* reflects both cases considered by Competency Panels and those progressed for investigation by Schools.

5.2 APPEALS DATA AND TRENDS

5.2.1 *Appendix A* provides a detailed analysis of appeal cases (and summary level complaint data for the purposes of comparison) since 2020/21. In summary, appeal cases received were as follows in *Table 1.1* below. Appeal submissions as a percentage of the total student population is provided in brackets.

Table 1.1: Total Cases by Academic Year

2024/25	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
337 (1.7%)	491 (2.3%)	506 (2.3%)	464 (2.1%)	274 (1.3%)

5.2.2 The total number of cases has reduced from previous years. The number for 2024/25 includes all cases submitted, those considered by a Competency Panel and those progressed. The number of cases in proportion to the student population remains low (1.7%).

5.2.3 The following specific trends are also noted:

- A decrease in the number of submissions: the number of appeal submissions has decreased by 23% from 491 cases in 2023/24 to 337 cases in 2024/25. Of those numbers, 226 cases (67.7% of all cases) were considered by a Competency Panel only and did not progress to Schools for consideration.
- Most Schools saw a decrease in the total number of submitted cases, with the biggest decreases in Business (82 cases in 2024/25, compared with 144 cases in 2023/24); Engineering (27 cases in 2024/25, compared with 56 cases in 2023/24); and Social Science (13 cases in 2024/25, compared with 37 cases in 2023/24). The School with the largest number of cases is Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition (with 88 cases in 2024/25, amounting to 26.1% of submitted cases, a decrease on 2023/24 where there were 99 cases).
- Some Schools, namely Biological Sciences (6 cases in 2024/25, compared with 4 cases in 2023/24), Education (21 cases in 2024/25, compared with 17 cases in 2023/24), and Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture (21 cases in 2024/25, compared with 18 cases in 2023/24), saw modest increases to the total number of cases submitted. The School of Psychology had the fewest number of cases submitted (1 case in 2024/25, compared with 14 in 2023/24).
- The number of cases related to removal of a class certificate (C7) has reduced significantly in line with changes made to the Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals in June 2024, encouraging frontline resolution for C7 appeal cases, which has seen a marked decrease in the numbers of C7 cases being considered through the revised Appeals Policy in 2024/25. The total number of C7 cases received was 52 (15.4% of total number of cases), with only 10 of those progressed to Schools for investigation. In the previous academic year, there were 234 cases progressed to Schools for investigation. This represents a significant reduction.
- The number of combined cases (those cases which contain elements of both appeal and complaint) submitted has increased (18 cases in 2024/25, compared with 1 in 2023/24). However, only 6 cases were progressed for investigation as a combined case. Cases which are combined appeal and complaint are often more complex and cover a wide range of issues. These cases are treated under the Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals, so as not to disadvantage the student procedurally by allowing a further stage of appeal but often seeks input in the School response from the Senior Management team to confirm that the University is content with the response. While the student population continues to grow, cases and the issues raised

therein are more complex, particularly where cases concern international students studying on a student visa.

5.2.4 As is noted above, in academic year 2024/25 approximately 1.7% of the student population appealed to the University. Of the 337 cases processed, 23% (52) related to student monitoring and were submitted in response to a student being issued with a 'C7' as a consequence of a lack of engagement with, or attendance at, a course. 81% (42) of appeal cases of this nature were deemed not competent. Where cases of this nature aren't upheld, this can result in varying outcomes for the student which range from termination of studies (where multiple C7s demonstrate a lack of engagement) to the student being required to undertake, in the following teaching period, either (i) the course again (where its completion is prescribed) or (ii) an alternative, additional course to ensure an appropriate number of credits can be achieved. Of the 10 C7 appeal cases which were progressed for investigation, only 5 were upheld (or partially upheld). 2 were withdrawn, and 3 were not upheld.

5.2.5 With regard to the appeals received in 2024/25 which did not relate to student monitoring, these most commonly referred to mitigating circumstances, disputed degree classification or CGS assessment grade, request for a further resit opportunity, and perceived poor, inconsistent or inaccurate communication and/or support. Mitigating circumstances concerns: (i) those circumstances which had not been reported by the student at the time of assessment; and (ii) those circumstances which had been reported but that the student has concerns as to whether these were taken into account by the School. Degree classification and CGS marks are disputed mainly where a student is borderline. Overall, 18% (11) of appeal cases which did not relate to student monitoring were upheld (or partially upheld).

5.2.6 Of the 111 appeal cases received in 2024/25, 32 cases (28.9% of the total number of progressed appeals) were not able to be concluded within the timescales as stipulated in the Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals. The 32 cases included those cases that were concluded at the initial stage (Head of School/Head of Section) and cases where students remained dissatisfied and had cases considered by Grounds to Proceed or Appeal Panels. On average, of the cases which were noted to extend beyond the timescales stipulated in the policy, cases which were considered at Head of School or Section level took 16.4 days to conclude, which is the same as 2023/24.

6. Complaint Handling

6.1 INTRODUCTION

6.1.1 The Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) follows the Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) published by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), providing a consistent MCHP across all public services in Scotland. The text and procedure were largely prescribed by the SPSO, tailored only to fit the University's context where permitted. The University is required to adhere to the MCHP, which was in force from 1 April 2021. The intention of the CHP is to engage all staff members across the institution in complaint handling, whereby each School or administrative section has a nominated individual to take responsibility for the recording of all frontline (or informal) complaints received in that area. The University's CHP is available on the University's [staff](#) and [student](#) webpages. The CHP remains integral to the University's student experience and specifically to both engaging in and improving that experience.

6.1.2 The University is actively engaged with the Scottish Higher Education Complaints Forum, which meets quarterly and continues to meet to facilitate networking and the sharing of good practice on complaint handling. Anecdotal evidence regarding complaint figures (section 6.2 further refers) suggests the University does not appear to be at odds with other comparable institutions within the sector.

6.2 COMPLAINTS DATA AND TRENDS

6.2.1 *Appendix B* provides a detailed analysis of complaint cases (both informal (frontline) and formal (investigated)) since 2020/21. In summary, however, informal (frontline) and formal (investigated) cases were as follows in *Tables 2.1* and *2.2*.

Table 2.1: Frontline Complaints by Academic Year

2024/25	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
5	31	38	16	11

Table 2.2: Investigated Complaints¹ by Academic Year

2024/25	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21²
46	56	57	32	22

¹ The figures denote those cases regarded as complaints and therefore with little or no elements of academic appeal.

² In interpreting 2020/21 data, it should be noted that during the initial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, the University saw a rise in the number of submissions received which have not been taken forward under the CHP. These submissions sought a refund of fees (tuition or accommodation) as a consequence of the impact of the pandemic. In these cases, an explanation was given as to why the University would not give a refund and why further investigation under the CHP was not appropriate.

6.2.2 Members of the Committee will note very few frontline complaint returns in recent academic years. Training was provided in 2025 to Frontline Complaints Handlers to disseminate across Schools and Professional Services regarding frontline complaints to ensure better recording instances of frontline complaints. It is hoped that with further training, this will improve further going forward. Frontline resolution is helpful for students as it enables issues to be explored and resolved in a timely manner and avoids unnecessary bureaucracy where it is possible to allay their concerns. Where this is not possible, the formal complaint route is used as a last resort.

6.2.3 Regarding formal or investigated complaint cases, members of the Committee will note that complaint cases has reduced from 56 in 2023/24, to 46 in 2024/25. Examples of submissions include issues related to course delivery and assessment, including feedback on assessment, tuition fee payment, issues pertaining to student accommodation or staff housing, admissions process, and provision of support offered by student support services.

6.3 REPORTING

6.3.1 The University is committed to reporting both internally and externally regarding complaints information. It is a requirement of the SPSO that the University report at least quarterly to the SMT and at least annually to the Senate and the Court on:

- performance statistics, in line with the complaints performance indicators published by SPSO;
- analysis of the trends and outcomes of complaints (this should include highlighting where there are areas where few or no complaints are received, which may indicate either good practice or that there are barriers to complaining in that area).

6.3.2 The data as requested by the SPSO is provided in *Appendix B*, listed alongside comparable data for previous academic years. The attention of the Committee is drawn to the outcome of cases. The outcome of a complaint is not always easily defined as 'upheld' or 'not upheld', dependent on the nature of the concern raised. Where a resolution has been sought, the case has been recorded as 'upheld', however, where an issue has resulted in the clarification of policy, or noted without further investigation, the case has been appropriately recorded but 'not upheld'.

6.3.3 Members of the **Quality Assurance Committee (QAC)** are invited to **discuss** the paper, in particular the data outlined in *Appendices A and B*.

7. Further Information

7.1 Further information is available from Emma Tough (Head of Academic Policy & Quality, e.tough@abdn.ac.uk); or Liam Dyker (Academic Policy & Quality Manager, liam.dyker2@abdn.ac.uk).

Date Paper Was Written: **[05/01/2026]**

Freedom of Information/Confidentiality Status

Open

ACADEMIC APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS REPORTING DATA (2024/2025)

	Academic Year 2024/2025	Academic Year 2023/2024	Academic Year 2022/2023	Academic Year 2021/2022	Academic Year 2020/2021
Student Population (Date)	20152 (18/12/2025)	21074 (02/12/2024)	21981 (12/10/2023)	23176 (26/01/2023)	21676 (06/05/2021)
Total Cases (% of Student Pop'n)	337 (1.7%)	491 (2.3%)	570 (2.6%)	502 (2.2%)	301 (1.4%)
Total Cases: Competency	226 (67.7%)				
Total Cases: Progressed	111 (32.9%)				
Competency Panels					
Academic Appeals	157 (69.5%)				
C7 Appeals	52 (23%)				
Combined	18 (8%)				
Competency Panel Outcomes					
Competent	48 (21.2%)				
Not Competent	163 (72.1%)				
Withdrawn	15 (6.6%)				
Competency Panel Cases by School					
Biological Sciences	2 (0.9%)				
Business	52 (23%)				
Business (Qatar)	11 (4.9%)				
DHPA	18 (8%)				
Education	16 (7.1%)				
Engineering	19 (8.4%)				
Geosciences	5 (2.2%)				
Law	10 (4.4%)				
Law (Qatar)	1 (0.4%)				
LLMVC	12 (5.3%)				
MMSN	54 (23.9%)				

	Academic Year 2024/2025	Academic Year 2023/2024	Academic Year 2022/2023	Academic Year 2021/2022	Academic Year 2020/2021
NCS	13 (5.8%)				
Psychology	1 (0.4%)				
Social Science	8 (3.5%)				
Social Science (Qatar)	2 (0.9%)				
Services	2 (0.9%)				
Academic Appeals					
Academic (including C7)	62 (55.9%)	434 (88.4%)	506 (88.8%)	464 (92.4%)	274 (91%)
C7	10 (9%)	234 (47.7%)	233 (40.9%)	271 (54%)	116 (38.5%)
Non-Academic	3 (2.7%)	1 (0.2%)	0 (0%)	4 (0.8%)	5 (1.7%)
Complaints					
Academic	35 (31.5%)	52 (10.1%)	48 (8.4%)	22 (4.4%)	13 (4.3%)
Non-Academic	5 (4.5%)	3 (0.6%)	9 (1.6%)	10 (2%)	8 (2.7%)
Combined Cases					
Academic / Non-Academic	6 (5.4%)	1 (0.2%)	7 (1.2%)	2 (0.4%)	1 (0.3%)
Case Outcome					
Upheld	18 (16.2%)	194 (39.5%)	229 (40.2%)	286 (57%)	148 (49.2%)
Partially Upheld	17 (15.3%)	52 (10.6%)	79 (13.8%)	26 (5.2%)	15 (5%)
Not Upheld	68 (61.3%)	219 (44.6%)	241 (42.3%)	164 (32.7%)	118 (39.2%)
Withdrawn	7 (6.3%)	25 (5.1%)	20 (3.5%)	26 (5.2%)	20 (6.6%)
Ongoing / In-Progress	1 (0.9%)	1 (0.2%)	1 (0.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Resolution Stage					
Initial Stage (Head of School / Section)	63 (56.8%)	406 (82.7%)	478 (83.9%)	437 (87.1%)	236 (78.4%)
Further Stage (Grounds to Proceed)	37 (33.3%)	83 (16.9%)	89 (15.6%)	64 (12.7%)	42 (43%)
Further Stage (Appeal Hearing)	3 (2.7%)	1 (0.2%)	2 (0.4%)	1 (0.2%)	3 (1%)

	Academic Year 2024/2025	Academic Year 2023/2024	Academic Year 2022/2023	Academic Year 2021/2022	Academic Year 2020/2021
Completed Within Timescale					
Yes	73 (65.8%)	400 (81.5%)	447 (78.4%)	420 (83.7%)	274 (91%)
No	32 (28.9%)	90 (18.4%)	122 (21.4%)	82 (16.3%)	27 (9%)
Cases by School / Service					
Biological Sciences	4 (3.6%)	4 (0.8%)	9 (1.6%)	10 (2%)	5 (1.2%)
Business ¹	15 (13.5%)	144 (29.3%)	200 (35.1%)	169 (33.7%)	59 (18.6%)
Business (Qatar)	3 (2.7%)				
Business (SCNU)	1 (0.9%)				
DHPA	3 (2.7%)	25 (5.1%)	35 (6.1%)	31 (6.2%)	27 (9%)
Education	5 (4.5%)	17 (3.5%)	11 (1.9%)	16 (3.2%)	8 (2.7%)
Engineering	8 (7.2%)	56 (11.4%)	82 (14.4%)	76 (15.1%)	72 (24%)
Geosciences	5 (4.5%)	12 (2.4%)	12 (2.1%)	4 (0.8%)	8 (2.7%)
Law	2 (1.8%)	19 (3.9%)	33 (5.8%)	45 (9%)	11 (3.7%)
LLMVC	9 (8.1%)	18 (3.7%)	19 (3.3%)	21 (4.2%)	10 (3.3%)
MMSN	34 (30.6%)	99 (20.2%)	76 (13.3%)	51 (10.2%)	37 (12.3%)
NCS	3 (2.7%)	31 (6.3%)	13 (2.3%)	21 (4.2%)	19 (6.3%)
Psychology	0 (0%)	14 (2.9%)	13 (2.3%)	3 (0.6%)	8 (2.7%)
Social Science	3 (2.7%)	37 (7.5%)	46 (8.1%)	32 (6.4%)	11 (3.7%)
Sixth Century Courses	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Services	16 (14.4%)	15 (3.1%)	23 (4.0%)	23 (4.6%)	27 (9%)
Level of Study					
Undergraduate	71 (64%)	336 (68.4%)	365 (64.0%)	312 (62.2%)	177 (58.8%)
Postgraduate	40 (36%)	153 (31.2%)	200 (35.1%)	190 (37.8%)	122 (40.5%)
N/A ²	0 (0%)	2 (0.4%)	5 (0.9%)	0 (0%)	2 (0.7%)
Nationality					
UK	61 (55%)	236 (48.1%)	248 (43.5%)	239 (47.6%)	156 (51.8%)
EU	2 (1.8%)	34 (6.9%)	42 (7.4%)	36 (7.2%)	34 (11.3%)

¹ Note: For Academic Years 2020/21 to 2023/24, the number of Qatar specific cases is included in the School total.

² Note: Where the appellant/complainant is not an enrolled member of the student population, it has not been possible to acquire demographical information.

	Academic Year 2024/2025	Academic Year 2023/2024	Academic Year 2022/2023	Academic Year 2021/2022	Academic Year 2020/2021
International	47 (42.3%)	218 (44.4%)	272 (47.7%)	224 (44.6%)	106 (35.2%)
N/A	1 (0.9%)	3 (0.6%)	8 (1.4%)	3 (0.6%)	5 (1.7%)
Global North vs South					
Global North	69 (62.2%)				
Global South	41 (36.9%)				
N/A	1 (0.9%)				
Gender					
Male	52 (46.8%)	250 (50.9%)	309 (54.2%)	299 (59.6%)	189 (62.8%)
Female	59 (53.2%)	237 (48.3%)	253 (44.4%)	199 (39.6%)	110 (36.5%)
Not Declared	0 (0%)	2 (0.4%)	4 (0.7%)	-	-
N/A	0 (0%)	2 (0.4%)	4 (0.7%)	4 (0.8%)	2 (0.7%)
Age					
Under 18	0 (0%)	6 (1.2%)	5 (0.9%)	5 (1%)	2 (0.7%)
18-20	19 (17.1%)	145 (29.5%)	162 (28.4%)	140 (27.9%)	70 (23.3%)
21-25	46 (41.4%)	194 (35.5%)	229 (40.2%)	194 (38.7%)	124 (41.2%)
26+	45 (40.5%)	143 (29.1%)	166 (29.1%)	160 (31.9%)	100 (33.2%)
N/A	1 (0.9%)	3 (0.6%)	8 (1.4%)	3 (0.6%)	5 (1.7%)
Disability					
Declared	38 (34.2%)	381 (77.6%)	121 (21.2%)	84 (16.7%)	59 (19.6%)
Not Declared	73 (65.8%)	110 (22.4%)	449 (78.8%)	418 (83.3%)	242 (80.4%)
Scottish Public Services Ombudsman					
Total Cases	9 (8.1%)	9 (1.8%)	7 (1.2%)	12 (2.4%)	8 (2.7%)
Upheld	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Partially Upheld	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Not Upheld	9 (8.1%)	9 (1.8%)	6 (1.1%)	12 (2.4%)	8 (2.7%)

ACADEMIC APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS REPORTING DATA (2024/2025)

	Academic Year 2024/2025	Academic Year 2023/2024	Academic Year 2022/2023	Academic Year 2021/2022	Academic Year 2020/2021
Student Population (Date)	20152 (18/12/2025)	21074 (02/12/2024)	21981 (12/10/2023)	23176 (26/01/2023)	21676 (06/05/2021)
Total Cases (% of Student Pop'n)	51 (0.3%)	87 (0.4%)	95 (0.4%)	48 (0.2%)	33 (0.2%)
Case by Type					
Frontline Cases	5 (9.8%)	31 (36%)	38 (40%)	16 (33%)	11 (33%)
Investigated Cases	46 (90.2%) ¹	56 (64%)	57 (60%)	32 (67%)	22 (67%)
Case Timelines²					
Frontline Cases Closed within Timeline	3 (5.9%)	11 (13%)	22 (23%)	9 (19%)	9 (27%)
Frontline Cases Granted an Extension	2 (3.9%)	20 (23%)	16 (17%)	7 (15%)	2 (6%)
Investigated Cases Closed within Timeline	21 (41.2%)	27 (31%)	26 (27%)	21 (44%)	20 (61%)
Investigated Cases Granted an Extension	22 (43.1%)	29 (33%)	30 (32%)	11 (23%)	2 (6%)
Frontline Case Outcomes³					
Upheld	3 (5.9%)	17 (19%)	22 (23%)	6 (13%)	8 (24%)
Partially Upheld ⁴	1 (2%)	6 (7%)	4 (4%)	5 (10%)	0 (0%)
Not Upheld	1 (2%)	8 (9%)	12 (13%)	5 (10%)	3 (11%)

¹ Note: 2 of these cases were withdrawn, and one remains ongoing.

² Note: The MCHP recognises that not all investigations will be able to meet the 5 or 20-day deadlines on the basis of the complex nature of some submissions which will require careful consideration and detailed investigation. Where a delay occurs, the agreement of the complainant is sought.

³ Note: The outcome of informal (frontline) cases is not always easily defined as 'upheld' or 'not upheld' dependent on the nature of the concern raised. Where a resolution has been sought, the case has been recorded as 'upheld', however, where an issue has resulted in the clarification of policy, or noted without further investigation, the case has been appropriately recorded but 'not upheld'.

⁴ Note: Where a complaint has covered several issues, where any of these are upheld, the outcome is recorded as 'partially upheld'.

	Academic Year 2024/2025	Academic Year 2023/2024	Academic Year 2022/2023	Academic Year 2021/2022	Academic Year 2020/2021
Investigated Cases Outcomes					
Upheld	9 (17.6%)	12 (14%)	18 (19%)	6 (13%)	6 (18%)
Partially Upheld ⁵	13 (25.5%)	11 (13%)	13 (14%)	4 (8%)	3 (9%)
Not Upheld	20 (39.2%)	32 (37%)	22 (23%)	18 (38%)	12 (36%)
Withdrawn	2 (3.9%)				
Ongoing / In-Progress	1 (2%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Average Time to Resolve Complaint Cases					
Frontline Cases	6 working days	14 working days	7 working days	8 working days	8 working days
Investigated Cases	30 working days	35 working days	27 working days	25 working days	24 Working days

⁵ Note: Where a complaint has covered several issues, where any of these are upheld, the outcome is recorded as 'partially upheld'.