COMPLAINTS HANDLING ANNUAL REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR SEPTEMBER 2025 – AUGUST 2026

1. Background

In common with all other Scottish Higher and Further Education Institutions, SRUC is subject to the requirement to have a Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) – details of the process are available on the website, Moodle and the SRUC intranet. The introduction and content of the CHP was driven by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). This report provides a summary and analysis of complaints handled by SRUC in the Academic Year 2025-26.

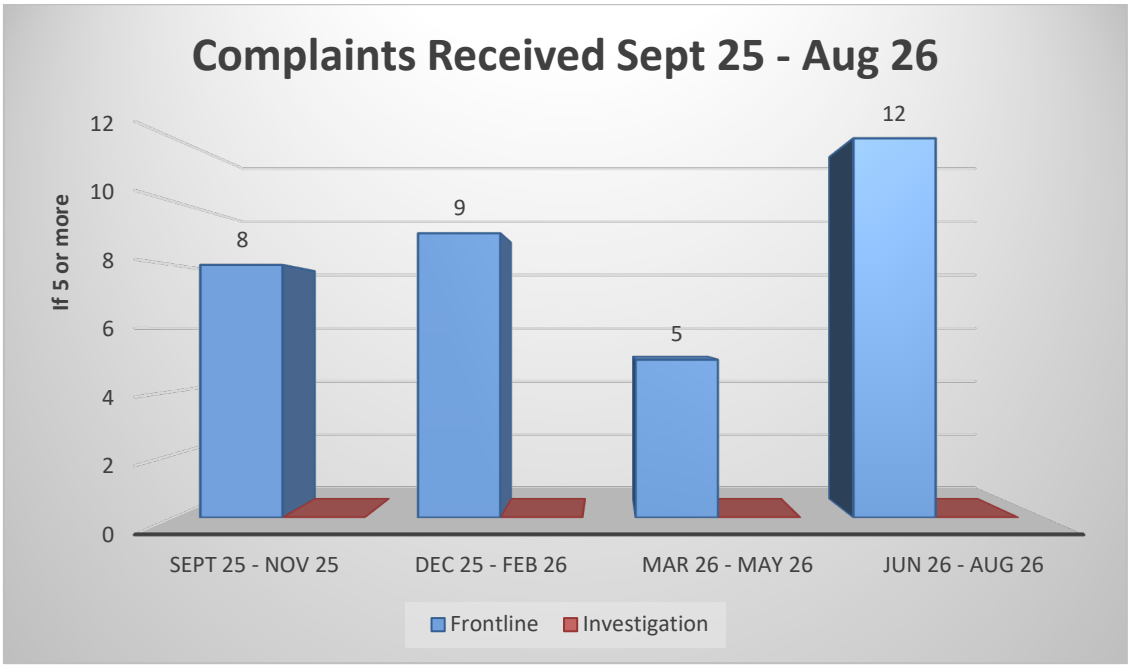
The MCHP procedure continues to use two internal stages, Frontline Resolution (Stage 1) by the service provider, and Investigation (Stage 2) by a neutral independent investigation officer. The emphasis is on the prompt resolution of complaints at the point closest to their occurrence. After the Investigation stage has concluded a complainant, if still dissatisfied, can appeal externally to the SPSO.

Due to the requirement of publishing complaints data, in line with many other organisations, SRUC do not publish data less than 5 so that individual cases cannot be identified. Column titles indicate areas where complaints were received.

2. Annual Complaints Data

2.1 Number of Complaints received (if 5 or more)

The number of complaints investigated at Stage 2 are not shown in the graph due to there being less than 5 in each reporting period. However, a total of 12 Stage 2 investigations occurred in the past year.



Academic Year	Total number of complaints recorded	From members of the public	From or on behalf of students (includes applicants)
2025-26	46	8	38

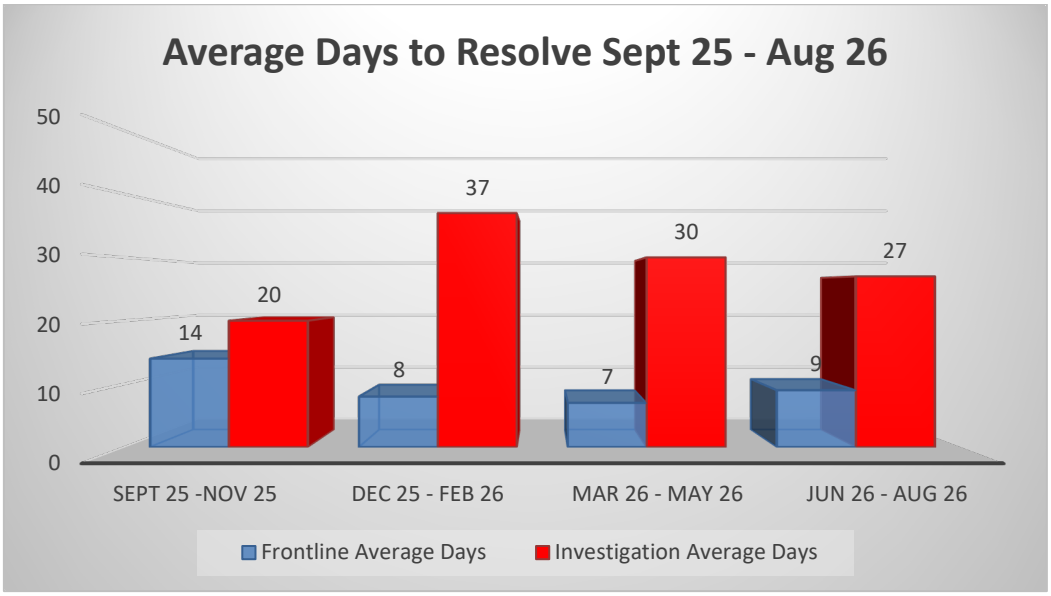
The above figures also reflect 9 Stage 1 complaints recorded further as a Stage 2 complaint after escalation.

Complaints received regarding staff were referred for review under SRUC's HR policies and procedures. Complaints in respect of commercial services, for example, related to services offered by SAC Commercial are not recorded in the CHP but are subject to separate procedures.

2.2 Time taken to deal with complaints

The SPSO target timescales for resolving complaints are 5 working days for Frontline Resolution and 20 working days for Investigation cases. It is not always possible to deal with complaints within these time scales due to annual leave, illness or occasionally because a complaint is complex and involves liaising with a number of individuals.

This chart sets out the average number of working days taken to resolve complaints.

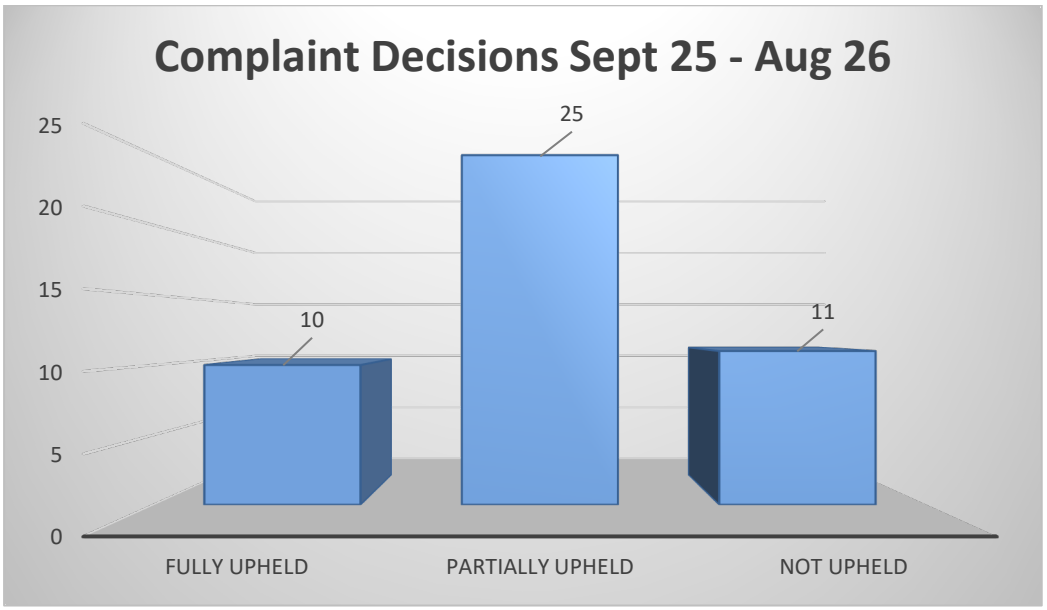


The target dates for dealing with Stage 2 complaints were not achieved in all but one of the Stage 2 complaints received. All cases that extended beyond the 20 day investigation timeframe involved complex issues requiring collaboration across several teams. Staff availability was further impacted by annual leave during the winter and summer periods, resulting in extended resolution times. Complainants were kept updated on timescales.

Less than half of the Stage 1 complaints met the required target dates, annual leave and the complex nature of the cases were the main reasons for those frontline resolutions that did not meet the target of five days. Complainants did agree to extensions where required. This is an area that SRUC must improve upon in 2026-27 and beyond.

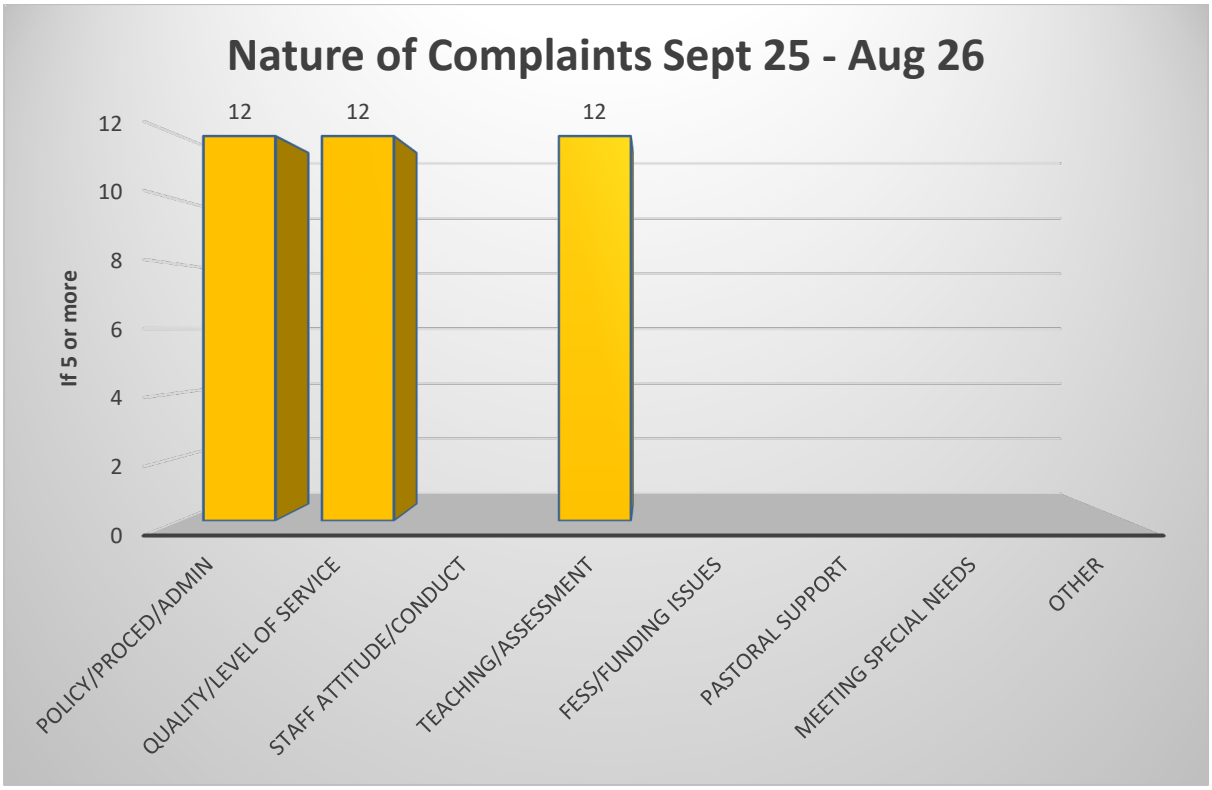
2.3 Complaint Decisions

The following chart summarises the decisions made during the year.



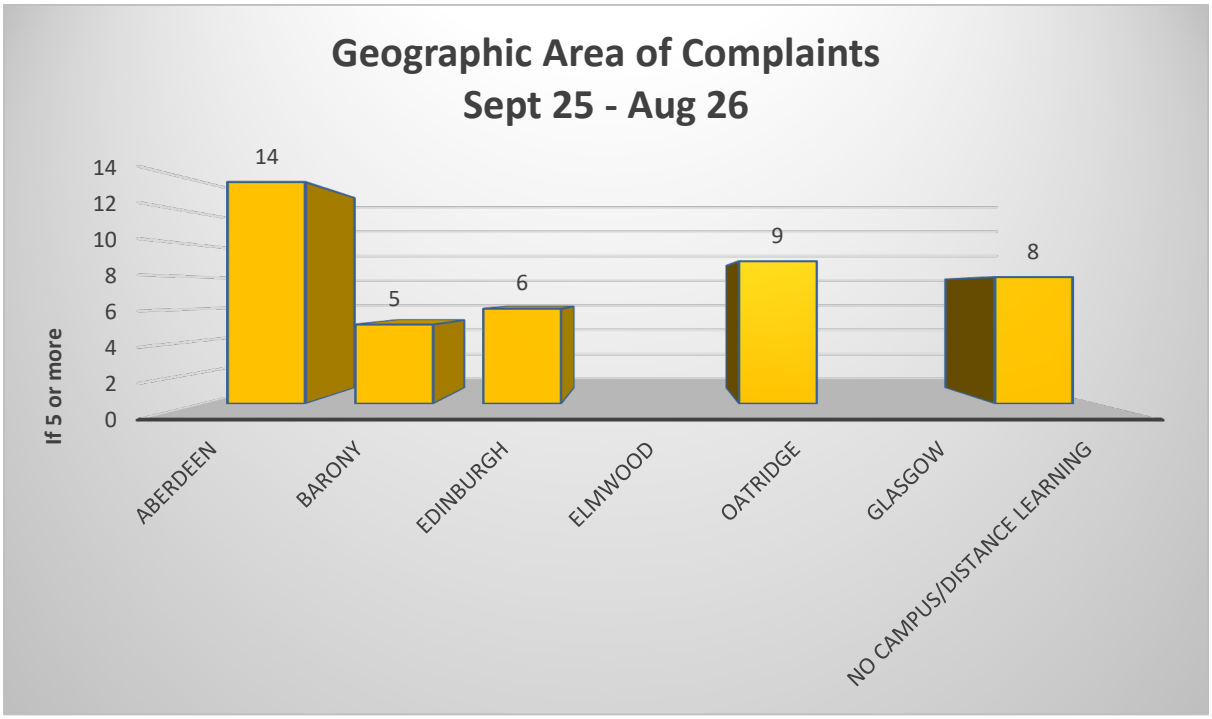
2.4 Nature of Complaints

Of the complaints received during the academic year 2025-2026 most have been made to the Academic Division. The following graph sets out the category of complaints received, where complaints received have numbers of 5 or more. Due to the requirement of publishing complaints data, in line with many other organisations, we are not publishing data less than 5 so that individual cases cannot be identified. Column titles indicate areas where less than 5 complaints were received.

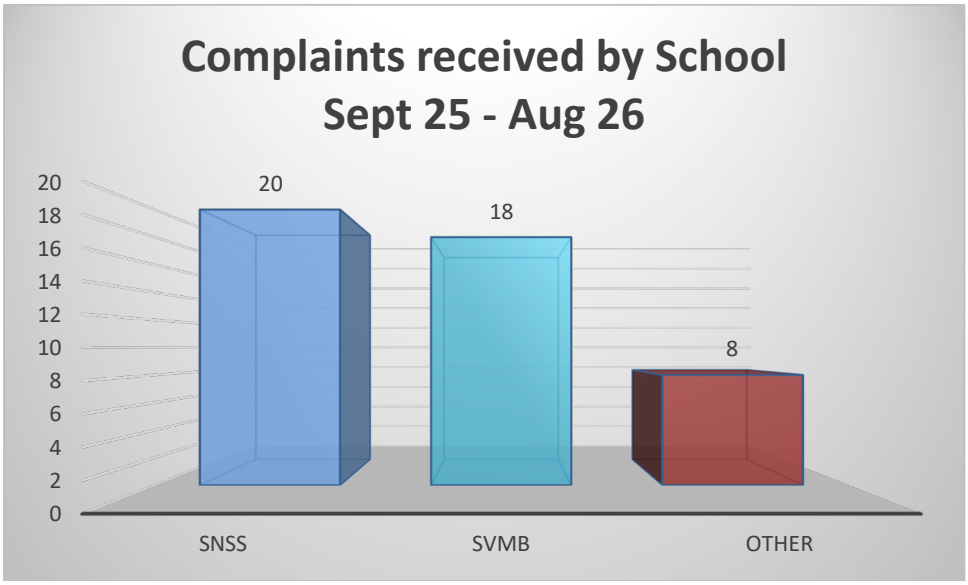


2.5 Geographical area of complaints received

SRUC currently deliver from five locations across Scotland and run Work-based (No-Campus) and Distance Learning Courses. The graph below shows the geographic locations of where complaints originated from if known (if 5 or more).



2.6 Complaints received by Academic School



2.7 Referrals to SPSO

In the 12-month period, two complaints were referred to SPSO. This is the highest number in an annual period SRUC have had – figures would normally be 1 every 2 or 3 years. The outcome of the SPSO referrals in 2025-26 were found in SRUC's favour. It is unfortunate that complainants remain dissatisfied and refer to SPSO, it is a positive reflection of SRUC's approach that none were upheld.

3. Learning Points

There was a significant increase in complaints in academic year 2025-26, rising from 28 in 2024-25 to 46 in 2025-26, representing a 64.3% increase. However, the number of complaints in 2023/24 was 39, and the 28 complaints received in 2024-25 was considerably lower than in recent years. The higher number is due to an increase in student complaints rather than from members of the public. It is impossible to be exact why there was an increase in complaints, but it could have been due to better awareness of the complaints process, increased expectations of students and restructuring within SRUC.

Most complaint outcomes, particularly stage 2 investigations, include recommendations for improvements for the service provider from the investigator, and SRUC encourages this helpful feedback. The amount these recommendations are shared with the complainant depends on the circumstances.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman have published (August 2025) updated complaints handling principles. These principles do not alter the model complaints handling process but rather set the environment in which complaints must be handled – around **accessibility**; **person centred; simple and timely; thorough and proportionate; objective, impartial and fair**; leading to **resolution** and **learning.** Further details are available at
spso.org.uk/sites/spso/files/standards/ComplaintsPrinciples.pdf

October 2026