

SQA Accreditation Annual Complaints Handling Report

April 2022 – March 2023

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SQA Accreditation

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Context

This report reflects annual performance in complaints handling for the period April 2022 – March 2023.

SQA operates complaints handling procedures for both its awarding and accreditation functions in line with the requirements of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) Act 2002. The SPSO is the final escalation stage for complaints about local authorities, the National Health Service, housing associations, colleges and universities, prisons, most water providers, the Scottish Government and its agencies and departments and most Scottish authorities. The SPSO has the statutory power to determine how these public bodies manage, respond to and report complaints.

This report covers SQA's accreditation function. It is presented in accordance with [requirements published by the SPSO in March 2022](#). The SPSO requires relevant organisations to publish their first report in this format by the end of October 2023.

SQA Accreditation complaints handling procedures

The SPSO requires public sector bodies in Scotland to adopt a [mandatory complaints handling procedure](#). The procedure outlines the way SQA considers and responds to complaints.

The SPSO's definition of a complaint is specific and limited to the following focus, which SQA has adopted, and which describes a complaint as *'an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about SQA Accreditation's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of SQA Accreditation.'* More detail of SQA Accreditation's definition of a complaint, based on the national mandatory model, is set out in the [Appendix](#).

On receipt of any communication that appears to express dissatisfaction, we are required to consider whether the points raised meet the definition of a complaint. It is then categorised as being eligible for the complaints handling procedure, or not eligible. It is important to highlight that disagreement about academic judgment is specifically excluded from eligibility because the SPSO cannot look at the exercise of academic judgment.

Ineligible communications are then handled as enquiries by colleagues across the organisation. They are not included in this report.

Reporting of complaints

Complaints can be closed at these stages (as specified by the SPSO):

- ◆ Frontline (stage 1) — complaints that are straightforward to resolve.
- ◆ Investigation (stage 2) — more complex complaints can be submitted for investigation.
- ◆ Some complaints are escalated from frontline to investigation before being closed.

Complaints performance indicators

SQA Accreditation is required to report against four performance indicators set by the SPSO:

- 1 Number of complaints received.
- 2 Number and percentage of complaints at each stage that were closed within the set timescales.
- 3 Average time for a full response at each stage.
- 4 Outcome of complaints at each stage.

Indicator 1: The total number of complaints received

This indicator records the total number of complaints received. This is the sum of the number of complaints received at Stage 1 (this includes escalated complaints as they were first received at Stage 1), and the number of complaints received that are handled directly¹ as Stage 2.

	2022-23
Total number of complaints received	0
Handled at Stage 1	0
Handled directly at Stage 2	0
Escalated to Stage 2 following Stage 1	0

¹ That is, not escalated from Stage 1

Indicator 2: The number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales

SQA Accreditation’s complaint handling procedure requires complaints to be closed² within five working days at Stage 1 and 20 working days at Stage 2. Extensions to these timescales can be authorised in exceptional circumstances. However, if an extension is authorised, the complaint is considered as ‘late’ — closed outwith the set timescales.

This indicator will report:

- 1 The number of complaints closed in full at stage 1 within five working days as a percentage of all stage 1 complaints responded to in full
- 2 The number of complaints closed in full at stage 2 within 20 working days as a percentage of all stage 2 complaints (treated directly as stage 2) responded to in full
- 3 The number of complaints closed in full after escalation within 20 working days as a percentage of all complaints responded to in full after escalation
- 4 The number of complaints closed in full with an extension to the initial target timescale, in accordance with the SPSO’s model, as a percentage of all complaints.

	2022–23
1 Complaints closed in full on time at Stage 1	Not applicable
2 Complaints closed in full on time at Stage 2 (excluding escalated responses)	Not applicable
3 Complaints closed following escalation to Stage 2 after a Stage 1 response	Not applicable
4 Complaints closed in full during a permitted extension to timescale, as a percentage of all complaints	Not applicable

² This is where a full response has been given to customer / resolution has been reached – and includes those complaints where action is still to be taken once complaint is closed.

Indicator 3: The average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage

This indicator represents the average time in working days for a full response to complaints to be issued at each stage.

This indicator will report:

- 1 The average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage 1.
- 2 The average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage 2 (treated directly as stage 2).
- 3 The average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation.

1	Average time in working days to respond at Stage 1	Not applicable
2	Average time in working days to respond for Stage 2 (excluding escalated responses)	Not applicable
3	Average time in working days to respond after escalation	Not applicable

Indicator 4: The outcome of complaints at each stage

This indicator provides the outcomes for complaints at each stage for the period April 2022 – March 2023.

There are four outcome categories: resolved, upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. This indicator will report:

- 1 The number of complaints (a) upheld, (b) partially upheld, (c) not upheld and (d) resolved as a % of all complaints closed at stage 1.
- 2 The number of complaints (a) upheld, (b) partially upheld, (c) not upheld and (d) resolved as a % of all complaints closed at stage 2 (treated directly as stage 2).
- 3 The number of complaints (a) upheld, (b) partially upheld, (c) not upheld and (d) resolved after escalation as a % of all complaints closed after escalation.

	Upheld	Partially upheld	Not upheld	Resolved
1 Stage 1	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
2 Stage 2 (excluding escalated responses)	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
3 Escalation	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable

Complaint trends and improvement actions

SQA Accreditation acknowledges and appreciates the opportunity to learn from complaints. Where we identify areas for improvement because of complaints raised, we will seek to improve our services or procedures.

Publication and awareness

This first annual report is presented in the format required by the SPSO. As required, and subject to approval of the Accreditation Committee, it is intended for publication on SQA Accreditation's website by end October 2023.

Appendix: definition of complaint

The SPSO's definition of a complaint is further supported by clear definitions about what is and what is not a complaint:

A complaint can be about:

- ◆ failure or refusal to provide a service
- ◆ inadequate quality or standard of service, or an unreasonable delay in providing a service
- ◆ dissatisfaction with one of our policies or its impact on the individual
- ◆ failure to properly apply law, procedure or guidance when delivering services
- ◆ failure to follow the appropriate administrative process
- ◆ conduct, treatment by or attitude of a member of staff, appointee or contractor (except where there are arrangements in place for the contractor to handle the complaint themselves)
- ◆ disagreement with a decision, (except where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision, or an established appeals process followed throughout the sector)

A complaint is not:

- ◆ a disagreement with academic judgment
- ◆ a routine first-time request for a service
- ◆ a request for compensation only
- ◆ issues that are in court or have already been heard by a court or a tribunal
- ◆ disagreement with a decision where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision (such as for freedom of information and subject access requests), or an established appeals process followed throughout the sector
- ◆ a request for information under the Data Protection or Freedom of Information (Scotland) Acts