

Annual Report 2025-26

Introduction

Complaints are received all year round from several different sources although the primary source tends to be from students. Complaints are received through a variety of mechanisms including direct emails, complaints forms and the Red Button. UHI Inverness uses the SPSO categories and sub-categories to classify complaints. The outcomes from complaint resolution are reported to UHI (HE) and published on the UHI Inverness website (FE).

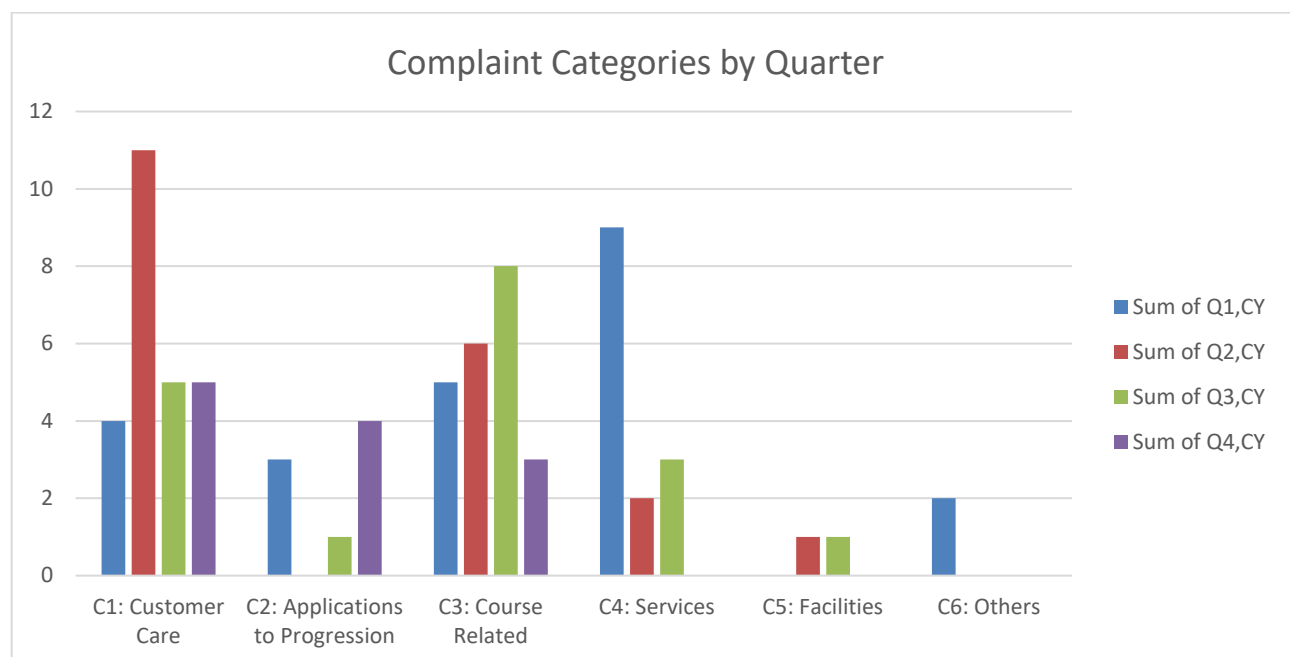
Complaints are grouped into quarters depending on the time of year in which they are received. The quarter dates are detailed below:

- Quarter 1 (Q1): August – end of October,
- Quarter 2 (Q2): November – end of January,
- Quarter 3 (Q3): February – end of April,
- Quarter 4 (Q4): May – end of July.

This report provides an overview of the complaint categories and outcomes across academic year 2025-26 (Q1 – Q4) including Q4 statistics.

Complaints by Category

The graphs below display the sum of quarterly complaints received for each category.



The tables below detail the sum of quarterly complaints received for each category in the current and previous academic year.

Customer Category: Current Year 2025/26 (Quarter)	YTD	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
C1: Customer Care	25	4	11	5	5
C2: Applications to Progression	8	3	-	1	4
C3: Course Related	22	5	6	8	3
C4: Services	14	9	2	3	-
C5: Facilities	2	-	1	1	-
C6: Others	2	2	-	-	-
Total	73	23	20	18	12

Customer Category: Previous Year 2024/2025 (Quarter)	YTD	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
C1: Customer Care	11	5	6	-	-
C2: Applications to Progression	3	1	-	1	1
C3: Course Related	24	6	3	14	1
C4: Services	5	2	2	1	-
C5: Facilities	2	1	-	-	1
C6: Others	-	-	-	-	-
Total	45	15	11	16	3

Summary:

A total of 12 complaints were received in Q4, compared to 3 in the same quarter last year.

- C1: Customer Care** complaints accounted for the highest number this quarter, compared to nil in the same quarter last year. Overall complaints for this category this quarter related to:
 - Staff conduct
 - Student conduct
 - Communications
- C2: Applications to Progression and C3: Course Related** accounted for 4 and 3 complaints respectively this quarter, compared to 1 each for the same quarter last year. The remaining three categories received nil complaints. Overall complaints for these categories related to:
 - Application, admission, interview, enrolment, induction
 - Progression, articulation, withdrawal

- Facilitated learning and support
- Assessment, exams and certification

In 2025-26 there was a 38% increase in the total number of complaints compared to 2024-2025.

The category of 'Customer Care' received the most complaints this year, of which 72% were within the 'Staff conduct' subcategory. These related mainly to poor customer service, inappropriate staff conduct, and a lack of respect from staff.

The category 'Course Related' received the second most complaints in 2025-26 of which 24% were within the 'Learning and Teaching subcategory. These related to lecturer use of AI, communication between staff and students, staff behaviour, student support and resource issues.

The table below shows the full breakdown of complaint categories and sub-categories, including the year-to-year shift.

Customer Category CY YTD vs PY YTD	2025-26	2024-25	Change
C1: Customer Care	25	11	14
C1S01: Health & Safety	1	0	1
C1S02: Security	0	0	0
C1S03: Diversity & Equality	0	0	0
C1S04: Data Protection	1	1	0
C1S05: Environmental	0	0	0
C1S06: Staff Conduct	18	6	12
C1S07: Student Conduct	3	1	2
C1S99: Other	2	3	-1
C2: Applications to Progression	8	3	5
C2S01: Marketing	0	0	0
C2S02: Application, Admission, Interview, Enrolment, Induction	3	3	0
C2S03: Progression, Articulation, Withdrawal	5	0	5
C2S99: Other	0	0	0
C3: Course Related	22	24	-2
C3S01: Learning & Teaching	6	3	3
C3S02: Environment/Resources	1	3	-2
C3S03: Course Management	6	10	-4
C3S04: Facilitated Learning & Support	1	3	-2
C3S05: Assessment, Exams & Certification	4	3	1
C3S99: Other	4	2	2
C4: Services	14	5	9
C4S01: Finance	3	1	2
C4S02: Funding / Bursary	6	3	3
C4S03: Student Records	1	0	1

C4S04: Providing Learning Support	0	0	0
C4S05: Library / Learning Technology	0	0	0
C4S06: Quality etc.	0	0	0
C4S99: Other	4	1	3
C5: Facilities	2	2	0
C5S01: Catering	0	0	0
C5S02: Student Accommodation	1	1	0
C5S03: Maintenance, Lifts, Car Parking	1	1	0
C5S99: Other	0	0	0
C6: Others	2	0	2
C6S01: Others	1	0	1
C6S99:	1	0	1
TOTAL	73	45	28

Complaints by Stakeholders

The table below provides a summary of the total number of complaints received from stakeholders across each quarter of the current academic year. HE students, FE students and members of the public represented equal numbers of complaints received in Q4. For the year 2025-26, HE students accounted for the highest number of complaints at 48% of the total complaints received.

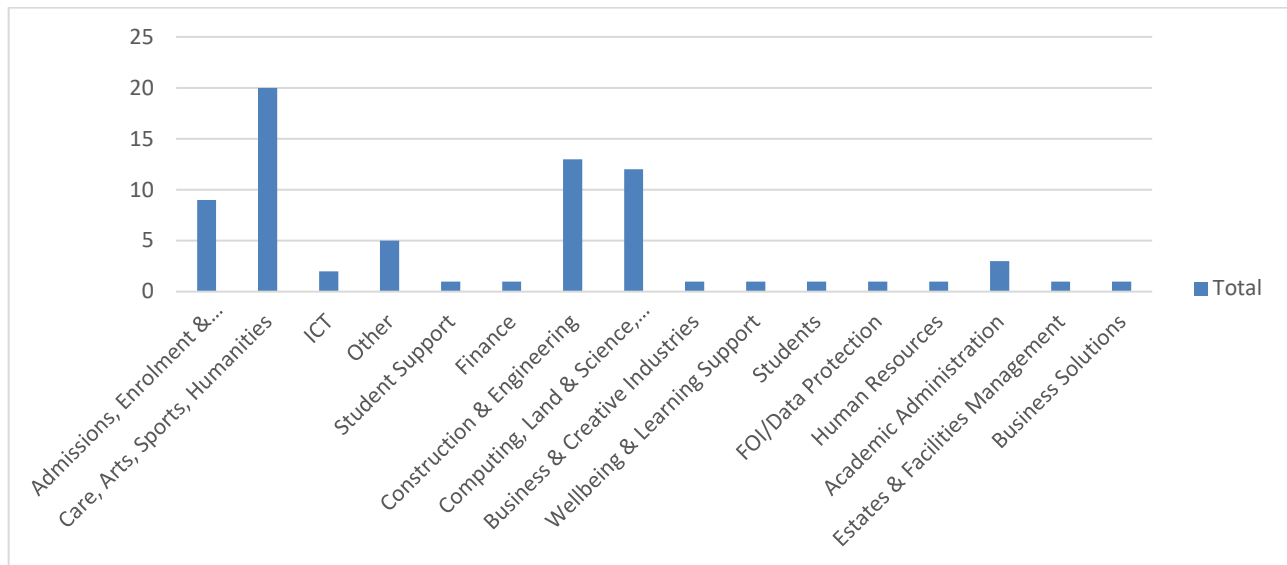
Stakeholder	YTD CY	Q1, CY	Q2, CY	Q3, CY	Q4, CY
Member of Public	10	3	3	1	3
Other	6	2	-	2	2
Stakeholder	2	-	-	1	1
Student – FE	20	5	6	6	3
Student – HE	35	13	11	8	3
Total	73	23	20	18	12

Complaints by curriculum area and department.

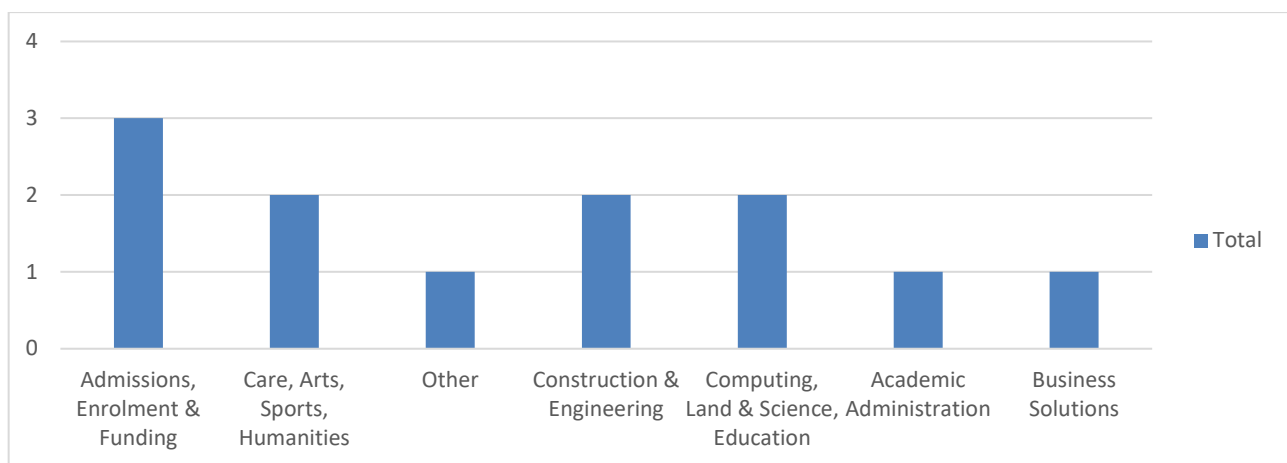
The graph below displays the number of complaints received by department throughout academic year 2025-26.

CASH received the greatest number of complaints, with 20 in total. This was an increase from the previous year, when 12 complaints were received in this area. The complaints related to the category of customer care (5), applications to progression (3), course related (8) and services (4).

Construction and Engineering received the second most complaints by department (13), split across the customer care (9), course related (3), and others (1) categories. The majority related to staff conduct.



The chart below shows the count of the areas the complaint relates to for Q4.



Admissions, Enrolment and Funding received the highest number of complaints in Q4, with three in total. This was followed by CASH, Construction, Engineering and Computing, Land Science and Education with two complaints each. Complaints were raised across three categories: Customer Care (5); Applications to Progression (4); and Course related (3).

Complaint Outcomes

In Q4, 4 complaints were 'Upheld', one was 'Partially Upheld' and one was escalated to Stage 2. Frontline Resolution accounted for 5.

Outcome	Stage 1	Stage 2	Total
Not upheld	0	0	0
Partially upheld	0	1	1
Upheld	1	3	4
Still under investigation	0	0	0
Escalated to Stage 2	1		1
Resolved	5	1	6
Not investigated	1	0	1

The table below shows the breakdown in stage 1 and stage 2 complaints in 2025-26 (Q1-Q4) and whether they have been resolved, upheld, partially upheld, not upheld or other outcome.

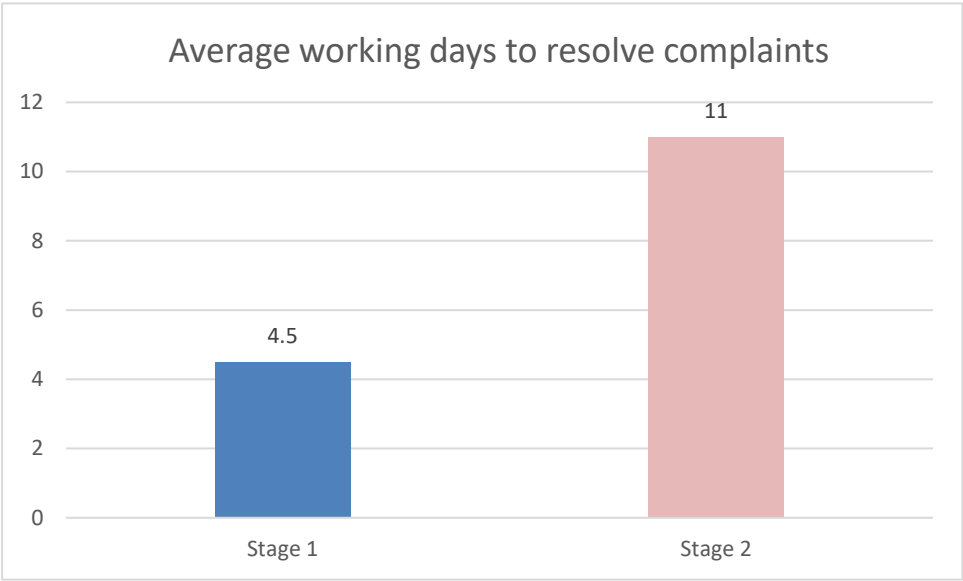
- Resolved – 28.4%
- Not upheld – 13.5%
- Partially upheld – 25.7%
- Upheld – 14.8%
- Escalated to Stage 2 – 2.7%

Outcome	Stage 1	Stage 2	Total
Not upheld	1	9	10
Partially upheld	6	13	19
Still under investigation	0	0	0
Upheld	6	5	11
Escalated to Stage 2	2		2
Resolved	9	1	10

In 2025-26 the number of complaints that were ‘Resolved’ decreased to 28.4% from 29% the previous year. The percentage of ‘Not Upheld’ outcomes increased to 13.5% from 13% the previous year. The percentage of ‘Upheld’ outcomes decreased from 28.8% last year to 14.9% this year. The ‘Partially Upheld’ outcomes decreased from 26.6% to 25.7%

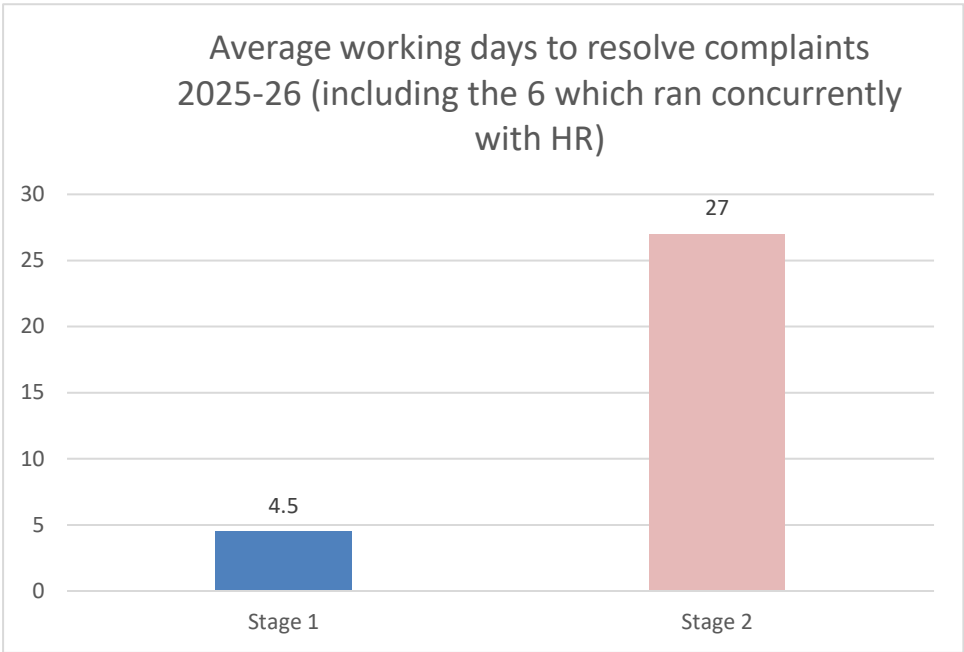
Complaint Timescales

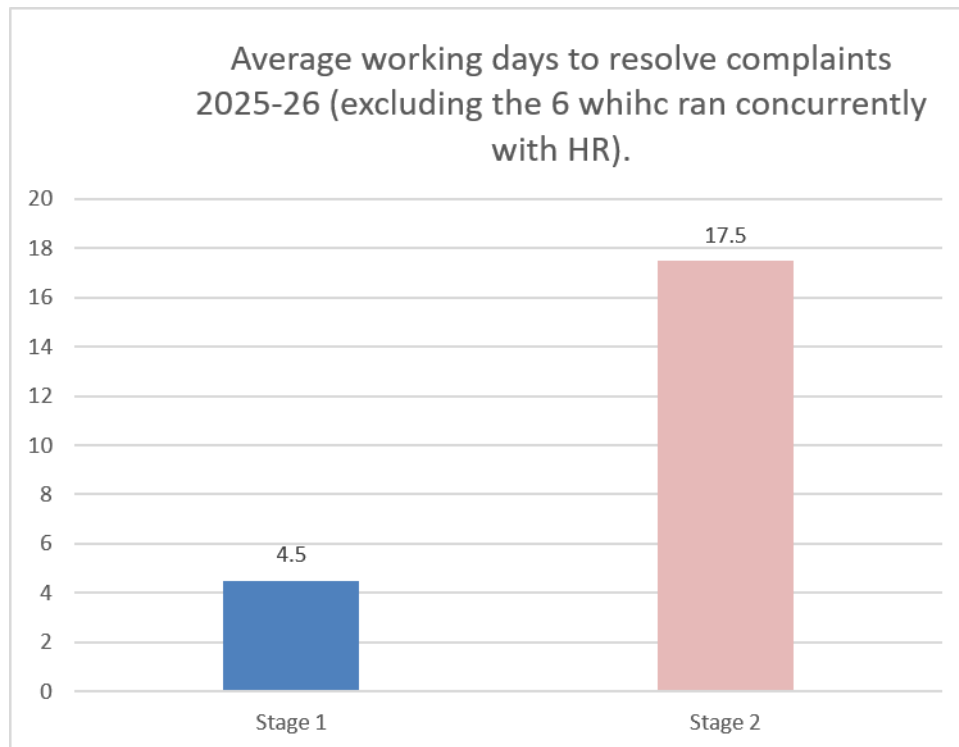
SPSO guidelines state pre-defined timescales of a 5 working day turnaround for Stage 1. An extension of 5 working days is permissible for stage 1 complaints subject to approval from the Quality Manager to complete an investigation but where escalation to a stage 2 is not required. For a Stage 2 complaint the timeframe for completion is 20 working days. As part of the Stage 2 process, where the complaint is complex and may take longer than 20 working days, an extension can be authorised by the Quality Manager, should this happen updates must be provided to complainants.



The chart above displays the average number of days taken to resolve complaints in Q4. The range of days taken to resolve Stage 1 complaints in Q4 is 5 days. The range of days taken to resolve Stage 2 complaints in Q4 is 11 days.

The chart below displays the average number of days taken to resolve complaints in 2025-26 (Q1-Q4).





The range of days taken to resolve Stage 1 complaints in 2025-26 is between 1 – 14 days. 16 complaints (84%) were completed within the required 5 days. Staff availability, multiple individuals involved, and the level of complexity were the reasons for exceeding the 5 working day timeframe for the remaining 3 complaints.

Omitting 6 individual complaints which took between 71 and 77 days due to a concurrent HR investigation, the range of days taken to resolve Stage 2 complaints in 2025-26 is between 5 - 31 days. 20 of these complaints (71%) were completed within the required 20 days.

Including the 6 complaints running concurrently with the HR investigation, 14 Stage 2 complaints exceeded the 20-day timeframe, and the complainant received notification of the delay. The delays were the result of the complexity of the complaints and the availability of staff over the college breaks.

There has been a lesson learnt that where a complaint is received and the only outstanding matter is an HR investigation, the complaint is closed and the complainant advised that in line with the CHP that an alternative, more suitable process is being followed.

Complaint Follow Up Survey

With the complaint outcome, complainants (unless the complaint was received anonymously) are sent a link to a short survey asking them for feedback on their experience of the complaints process and to rate their satisfaction levels against thirteen aspects of the process. The survey is anonymous unless the complainant chooses to identify themselves.

Six responses were received in 2025-26. The outcomes from this small sample are summarised below:

- 3 complainants (50%) were not aware of the complaints process prior to submitting a complaint.
- 4 complainants (67%) found the complaints process easy to access.
- 3 complainants (50%) found the complaint form easy to use.
- 4 complainant (67%) agreed they were able to obtain assistance in making the complaint
- 5 complainants (83%) felt they received a prompt acknowledgement of their complaint.
- 5 complainants (83%) felt their complaint was taken seriously.
- 5 complainants (83%) agreed that their complaint was thoroughly investigated.
- 1 complainant (17%) felt they were not kept informed during the process of the investigation.
- 2 complainants (34%) felt they did not receive a fair and objective response to their complaint.
- 1 complainant (17%) felt they did not receive a clear response to their complaint.
- All complainants (100%) felt they received a response within the appropriate timescale.
- 5 complainants (83%) felt they were dealt with courteously.
- 4 complainants (67%) felt that the complaint was closed off satisfactorily.

Four (anonymous) text comments were submitted. Two were expressions of dissatisfaction at their complaint outcome, and that their complaint was not taken seriously. Two were comments about how well the complaints process ran and the professionalism of all staff involved.

Learning from Complaints

Complaints often result in reviews of processes and procedures, and they also allow us to identify opportunities for staff development. The Quality team continues to identify any learning points from each complaint in order to identify themes emerging. Programme and support teams use complaints as part of their evidence bank to inform their evaluative activities aimed at improving the student experience.

Below are examples of actions taken as a result of complaints received during 2025-26:

- Reviewing the StS process in relation to INSIGHT, clarifying when StS applies, and developing additional guidance and training for PATs to promote consistent practice and clearer student support.
- Reviewing application-stage communication processes and programme approval timelines, with clearer and earlier communication of programme changes or withdrawals to applicants.
- Actions identified include delivering customer care and communication training to enhance staff confidence in handling enquiries, supporting students with additional needs, and managing difficult or distressing interactions.

- ICT induction with student to ensure issues around set up on devices resolved.
- DNS decision reversed, student re-enrolled; letter of apology sent to the student.
- Process in place to capture absences reported via text.
- Credit Control to add reference to fee policy in communications when pursuing debt collection.
- Quality and HR have met to discuss streamlining procedure when it's a joint investigation, and clear guidelines for investigating officer for both e.g. when one investigation ends what does investigating officer need to complete / sign off.
- Reviewing the use of AI-generated teaching materials and supporting staff to improve referencing practices, while promoting consistent application of the UHI Generative AI Policy across teaching teams.
- CCTV signage installed at smoking shelter.
- A formal CCTV procedure, covering how CCTV can be used and the process for accessing it, is to be implemented.
- The new Duty Manager procedure is to reinforce the need for all incidents to be recorded accurately, including details of those involved/ identified. With consideration of how and when the DM should give feedback and/ or further signposting to those raising concerns
- Induction process for all groups (including School's Programme and those without PATs/ PDAs- e.g. apprentices) reviewed to ensure expected behaviour standards and zero tolerance for misogyny and harassment are clearly communicated.
- PDAs to retain accurate records of induction sessions, including what content was covered in each session.
- Lecturer was given time to complete outstanding marking and final assessment date was moved back by one week to help any students who might be struggling due to the lack of feedback.

Themes emerging from complaints through the academic year 2025-26:

Of the complaints received this year, 33.3% related to customer care, with 72% of these concerning staff conduct. The majority of complaints focused on staff behaviour, professionalism, communication, and the quality of interactions with students. Additional concerns were raised regarding customer service and teaching effectiveness.

A further 29% of complaints were course related; learning and teaching, and course management each accounted for 27% of these complaints.

For learning and teaching, complaints primarily centre on lecturer professionalism, communication, student support, and teaching quality, including concerns regarding the use of AI-generated teaching materials, with reported impacts on student wellbeing, engagement, and the overall learning experience.

For course management, the complaints primarily relate to course organisation and management, communication issues, and a lack of academic support. Students raised concerns about programme changes, course delivery, class restructuring, and delayed or unclear communication from staff. Additional themes include staffing and resource challenges, admissions processes, and the administration of international student

requirements, with these issues impacting students' learning experience, engagement, and academic progression.

Raising Awareness of Complaints Process

Students are made aware of the complaints handling process during induction week and can be advised by college staff how to submit a complaint if required. Students also have support from the HISA advocacy service should they choose to use it. The complaints process is available on the UHI Inverness website and can be accessed via the Red Button tile on MyDay.

External stakeholders can access the complaint process via the college website or by contacting the college directly.