

## University of the Highlands and Islands

### Complaints Handling Procedure Annual Summary Report: 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014

#### Introduction

The University of the Highlands and Islands operates as a collegiate federal partnership comprising of thirteen further and higher education colleges, specialist colleges and research institutions. The University is committed to valuing complaints and our aim is to resolve issues of dissatisfaction as close to the initial point of contact as possible and to conduct thorough and fair investigations of complaints so that, where appropriate, we can make evidence-based decisions on the facts of each individual case.

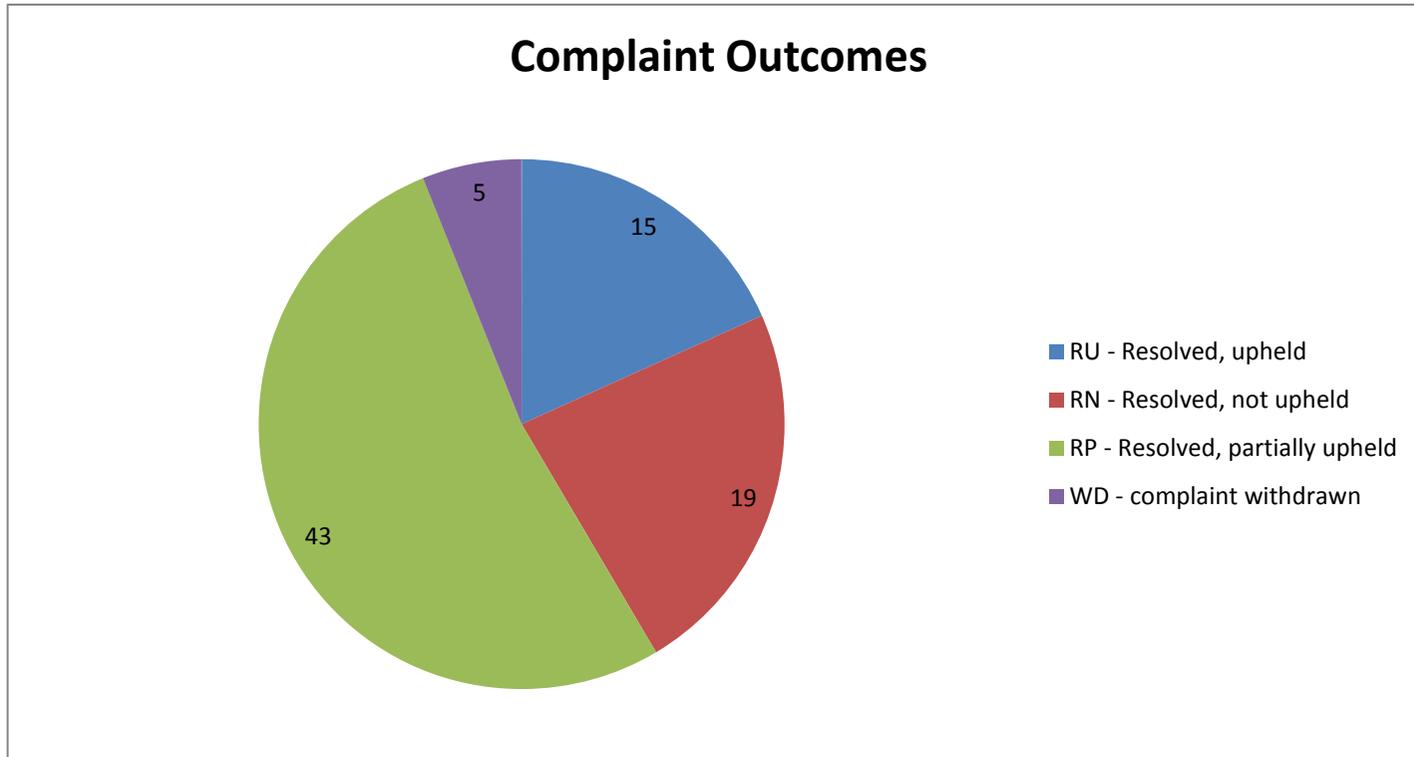
The University has adopted a two stage Model Complaints Handling Policy embracing the principles issued from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. These principles are that the complaints policy and process should be accessible, fair, flexible, confidential, clear, and timely. Consistent with this policy the University has committed to publish quarterly reports of complaints outcomes, trends and actions taken to improve our services as well as this annual summary. Reports are published on our website: <http://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/students/support/complaints/complaints-handling-reports>

#### Overview

The following table presents collated figures on HE related complaints received directly by the University and by our Academic Partners during 2014.

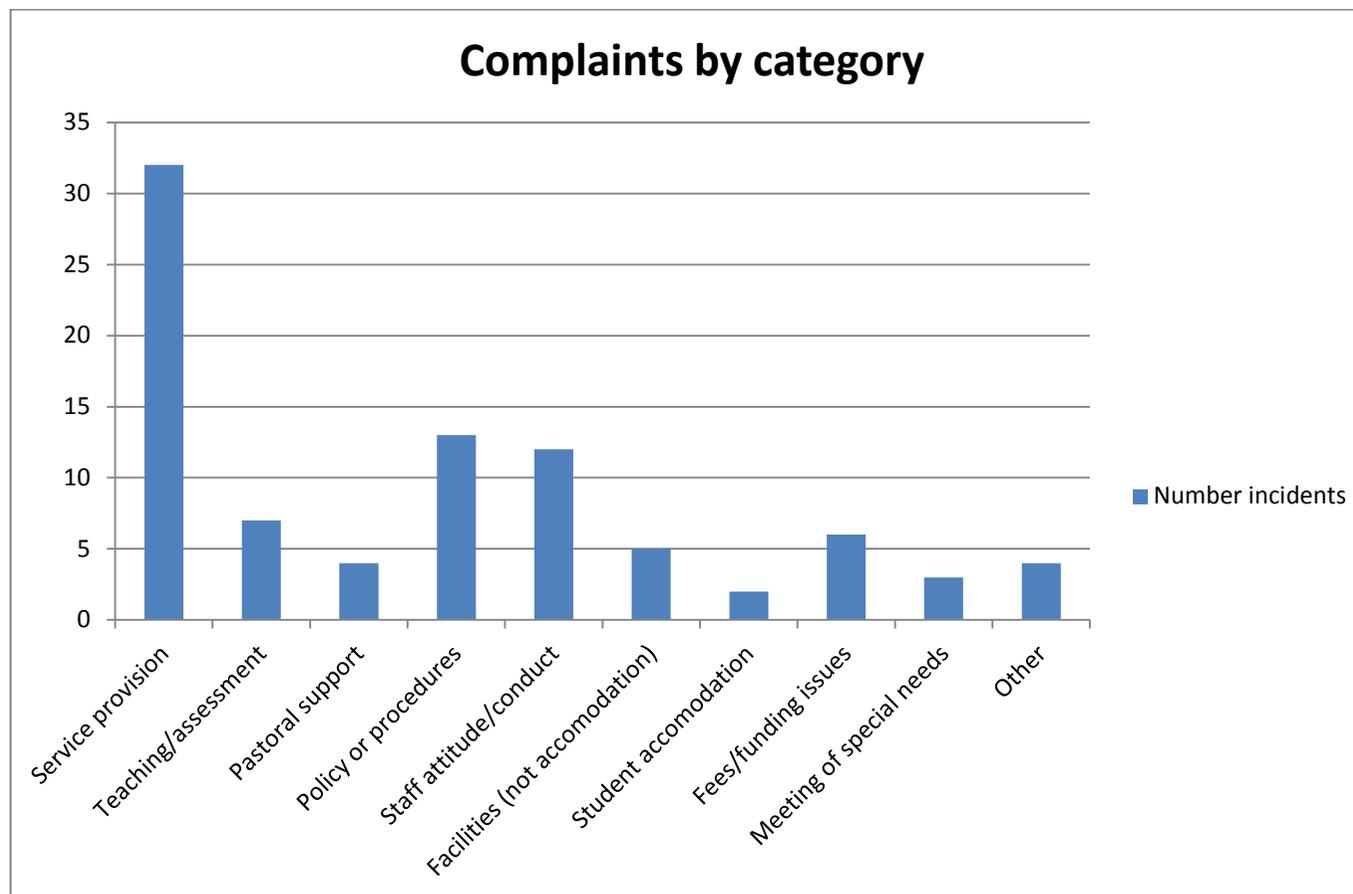
<b>Total number of complaints reported to UHI in 2014</b>	82
Number of complaints considered at the frontline resolution stage	82
Number of complaints closed at the frontline resolution stage	39 (48%)
Number of complaints referred to stage 2	43 (52%)
Number of complaints upheld	15
Number of complaints not upheld	19
Number of complaints partially upheld	43
Number of complaints withdrawn	5

The following chart provides a summary of complaint outcomes for the period: 2014



The following graph provides a summary of complaints by category type for the period:

Please note that some complaints received in the year highlighted concerns related to more than one category



## Key issues, Common Themes and Lessons Learned

The University publishes quarterly reports in relation to lessons learned and actions taken to improve services. The bullet points below represent a summary of some common themes.

- The University received more complaints about Service Provision than any other category during 2014. However, it should be noted that 25 complaints related to the same issue. The complaints were submitted jointly by two cohorts of HE students but were logged as separate complaints as per SPSO guidance. These complaints were referred to stage 2 for investigation and were subsequently partially. As a result of lessons learned the college concerned has acted to improve its communication with students regarding commercial activity undertaken on its premises.
- Five complaints were withdrawn during the year with at least one issue considered under an alternative University process. The University's CHP provides guidance on what is and what is not a complaint. The following are not complaints:
  - a routine, first-time request for a service
  - a request under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act or Data Protection Act
  - a request for information or an explanation of policy or practice
  - a response to an invitation to provide feedback through a formal mechanism such as a questionnaire or committee membership will generally not be treated as a complaint
  - an insurance claim
  - an issue which is being, or has been, considered by a court or tribunal
  - an attempt to have a complaint reconsidered where the University's procedure has been completed and a decision has been issued
  - a grievance by a member of staff which is eligible for handling through the grievance procedure
  - an appeal about an academic judgement on assessment or admission.

Alternative processes are in place to consider such issues. The University recognises that some situations can involve a combination of issues, where some are complaints and others are not, and on this basis the University will continue to assess each issue raised on a case by case basis.

- A common theme as regards lessons learned during 2014 is a need to ensure good and accurate communication of information about policies and frameworks between staff, students and the providers of student placements. Care must be taken to ensure that staff are aware and advised of any new policies or procedures and that appropriate training is provided. In addition, changes to policies and procedures should only be made mid-session in exceptional circumstances. The University is committed to providing clear guidance and information for staff and students to accompany policies including information about timescales and deadlines that apply to particular processes.
- A small number of complaints referred to stage two for investigation during the year were of a complex nature. The complaints handling procedure makes provision for such complaints where the complainant and/or other involved parties have become entrenched in their position to be resolved through mediation. The University recognises that mediation may help both parties to understand what is driving a particular complaint better and so may lead to a mutually acceptable resolution. Accordingly complaints investigators are being encouraged by the University to consider the use of mediation as a means of resolving complex disputes.