

15 December 2020

Dear Chief Executive

2019-20 complaint statistics for public services

We have now published annual complaints statistics for your organisation on our website. These give insight into service issues that the public have complained to us about, and we hope that this information will be used in tandem with your own complaints performance data to build a picture of what drives dissatisfaction and whether there are systemic changes that you can implement to improve your service.

The organisational statistics can be found in the drop-down menu on our 2019-20 Statistics page: <https://www.spsso.org.uk/statistics-2019-20>

2019-20 public service complaints overview

- The overall number of public service complaints we received during 2019-20 increased by 3% on the previous year 4,188 to 4,332.
- Cases carried forward from 2018-19 meant that our total caseload for 2019-20 was 5,173, the highest since 2015-16 when caseload was 5,275.
- 784 of 4,099 complaints came to us prematurely (i.e. before they had exhausted the local complaints handling procedure); a further drop of 1% on what has been a steadily decreasing figure over the years since Model Complaints Handling Procedures (MCHP) were introduced. This was a significant milestone, as this is the first year where the overall premature rate has dropped to below 20%, suggesting continuous improvement both for public bodies in effectively handling complaints locally and complainants using local procedures.

Sector comparison

The health sector continued to account for the largest proportion of cases we received in 2019-20 (as in previous years), accounting for 36% of complaints (1,562 cases) while local authorities accounted for 31% (1,327 cases).



There was an increase in the uphold rates from our decisions for the Scottish Prison Service (19% up from previous year) and Higher Education (31%).

Learning from complaints

We work continuously with our stakeholders to promote learning and drive improvements to ensure that complainants have their rights respected, and to avoid a future repeat of the problem for others. Integral to this is the making of recommendations resulting from investigations.

In our recommendations:

- when it comes to individual remedies we are most likely to ask for a specific action to be taken
- 38% of all recommendations were for individual remedies.
- regarding complaint handling recommendations, and learning and improvement, we take a slightly different approach though; here we focus on the outcomes we require and on the evidence that they have been achieved. This, we believe, promotes more sustainable and embedded learning and improvement
- 49% of recommendations were about learning and improvement
- 13% were about complaints handling.

You can find further information about this in our Annual Report 2019-20:

<https://www.spsso.org.uk/annual-report/2019-20.html#learning-from-complaints>

Compliance

As you know, we set a deadline for implementation of recommendations and follow them all up until we are satisfied that they have been implemented. In 2019-20, 52% of all recommendations were implemented within the target specified (the same as in 2018-19); 92% of recommendations were closed within three months of the target date set (94% in 2018-19).

Support and Intervention Policy

In April 2019, we introduced our Support and Intervention Policy (S&IP). This policy formalises the mechanisms we already used to offer support to your organisation and take intervention when required. It helps us to focus our resources on public bodies who require support in improving their practice or addressing poor performance; and it informs your organisation of what you can expect from us.

Activity under the different levels of the S&IP might be as straightforward as further contact from one of our complaints reviewers chasing up overdue information or, in situations of continued non-compliance or repeated difficulties, the Ombudsman may ultimately decide to issue a report to the Scottish Parliament drawing their attention



to the problem. By logging and monitoring these additional and further contacts, we can build a better overall picture of how organisations are responding to complaints as well as identifying problems in their interactions with us.

The most common S&IP intervention this year was further contact from one of our complaints reviewers. This successfully resolved most issues. On seven occasions, however, matters were not resolved at this first stage of the procedure, and a member of our leadership team made contact with the chief executive of the public body concerned to highlight the particular issues, referring to our S&IP and offering our support in resolving matters without necessitating further escalation.

We are pleased to report that our interventions have been successful and resulted in positive outcomes. We see the S&IP as an opportunity to engage constructively with organisations like yours to drive better outcomes for complainants.

You can find further information about 2019-20 support and intervention actions and a case study in our Annual Report 2019-20:

<https://www.spsso.org.uk/annual-report/2019-20.html#learning-from-complaints>

Further detail about the S&IP is available at:

<https://www.spsso.org.uk/support-and-intervention-policy>

Contact us

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any question or feedback, via communications@spsso.gov.scot.

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Agnew
Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

CC: Liaison Officer