

BOARD OF GOVERNORS: COVERSHEET

To, Date:	Audit & Risk Committee
Paper Author (and designation):	Kate Walklate, Senior Compliance Officer
Title of Paper:	Annual Report on SPSO Complaints, Academic Appeals and Student Conduct/Misconduct.
Summary of Paper:	Report on complaints, appeals and student conduct, focusing on 2023/24 academic session with contextualisation over a five-year period.
Recommendations (note/discuss/approve/ endorse):	The Academic Council is invited to note the Report.
Consultation:	None required.
Risk Management:	It is essential for GSA to manage complaints, appeals and student conduct effectively.
Resource Implications:	None identified.
Equality Impact Assessment Implications:	None identified.
Legal and Regulatory Considerations:	The Glasgow School of Art is subject to the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman's Model Complaints Handling Procedure.
Freedom of Information (FOI):	This Report can be released in full.
Next Steps:	None identified.

THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART

AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

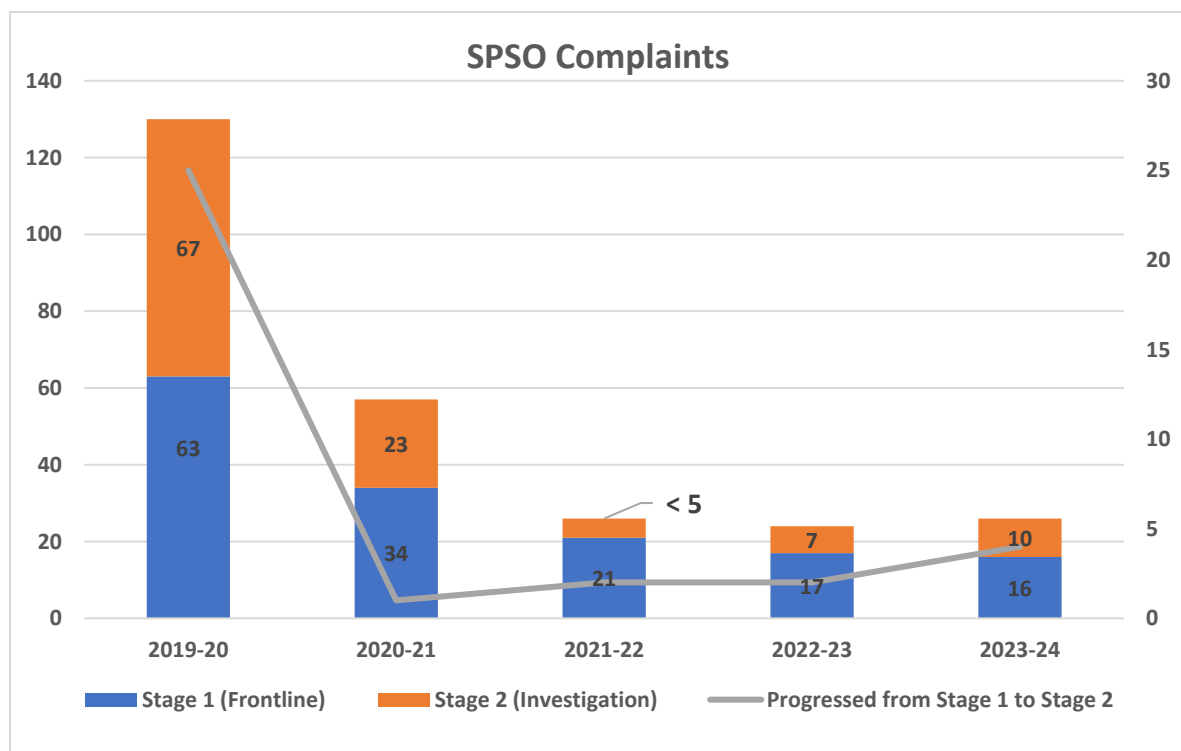
REPORT TO THE AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE ON SPSO COMPLAINTS, ACADEMIC APPEALS AND STUDENT CONDUCT/ MISCONDUCT

The Glasgow School of Art (GSA) Strategic Plan (2022-27) identifies three main principles of integrity, partnership and inclusivity and the key areas of focus are excellence, impact, and leadership. Complaints, Appeals and Student Conduct are three compliance areas, managed by the Academic Quality Office (AQO) where these principles can be assessed and the question of impact is particularly important, especially in relation to resources. Visual summaries of Complaints, Appeals and Student Conduct are provided separately, contextualising the data over a five-year period with a focus on the 2023/24 academic session.

1. SPSO COMPLAINTS

The GSA is subject to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's (SPSO) Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP). The MCHP divides complaints into Stage One (for routine, frontline complaints which should be resolved within five working days) and Stage Two (for more complex complaints, which should be resolved within twenty working days). Following the outcome of an investigation at Stage Two, complainants can ask the SPSO to review their complaint.

Chart 1.1: Summary of SPSO Complaints (2019-2024)



Compared to the previous year (2022/23) there has been a small decrease in the number of Stage 1 (Frontline) complaints and increase in the number of Stage 2 (investigation) complaints.

The two complaints that were referred to the SPSO in 2023/24 were closed. One complaint was out of time and one related to an admissions decision that the SPSO could not investigate further. No complaints have been referred to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) since 2020/21, which demonstrates that GSA's CHP is working to resolve complaints quickly and effectively.

The total number of complaints from 2021-24 show that number of complaints have stabilised and remain low compared to 2019-2021. There was a significant spike in complaints from 2020-2021 due to events such as COVID-19 and increased Industrial Action.

Complaint Themes

The current complaints register records complaint themes based on the National Student Survey (NSS) questionnaire topics. The NSS 2023 Questionnaire introduces new themes ([NSS 2023 questionnaire](#)) which were incorporated into GSA's complaint themes in 2023/24. The new themes are highlighted below.

Table 1.2: Complaint Themes (2019-2024)

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*New theme introduced in the 2023/24 academic session

** Replaced COVID-19 in the 2023/24 academic session

Chart 1.3: Complaint Themes (2019-2024)



* New theme introduced in the 2023/24 academic session

** Replaced COVID-19 in the 2023/24 academic session

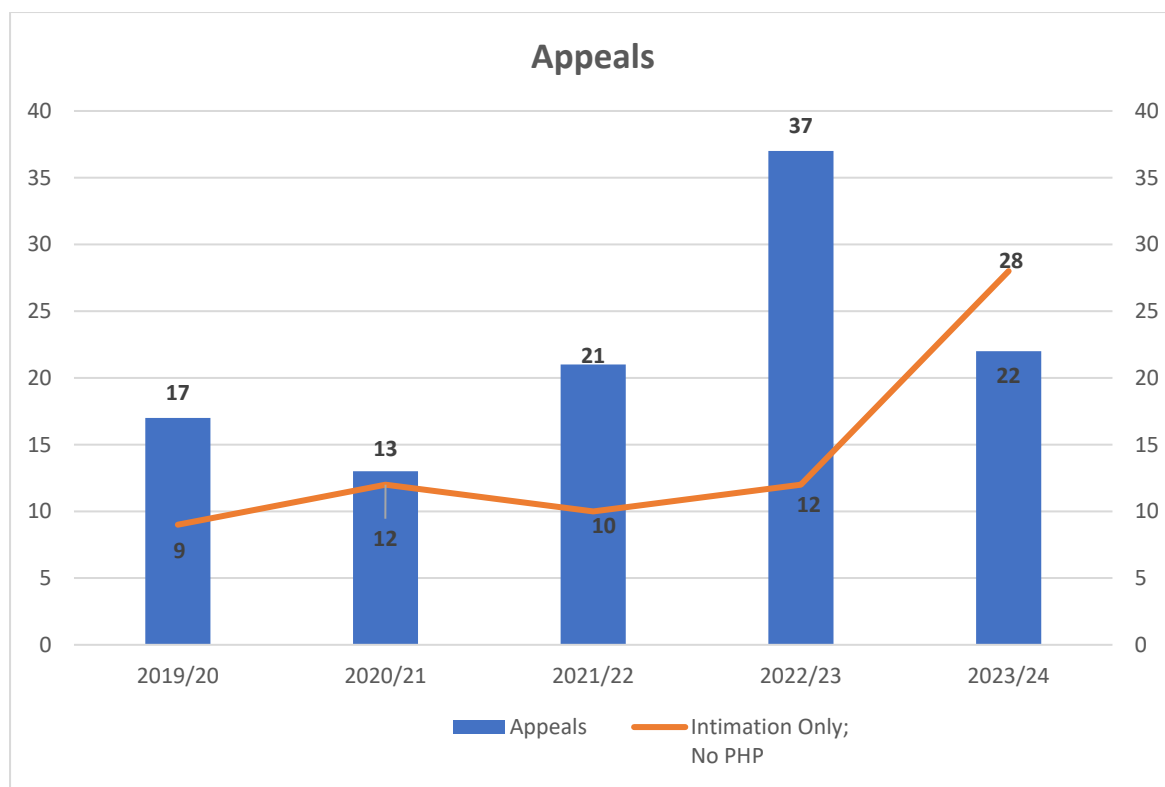
The highest number of complaints received in 2023/24 were in relation to Organisation and Management, which has been divided into academic and administration themes to account for the different complaint areas. Of the complaints classed as 'other' one was in relation to Visa requirements and the other was in relation to lift access in the Bourdon building. A new theme of race-related harassment or bias will be introduced in 2024/25 following the release of the new National Equality Outcomes.

2. ACADEMIC APPEALS

An appeal is defined as a request for a review of a decision of an academic body charged with making judgements concerning student progression, assessment or awards. By definition the appeals relate to academic cases and are only applicable to current GSA Students. An appeal may be made on any one or more of the following grounds as defined in the Code of Procedure for Appeals:

1. that there is evidence of factors affecting the student's performance that, for good reason, was not available to the relevant academic body at the time it reached its decision;
2. that there is evidence that the assessment process and decision made by the relevant academic body was not in accordance with the approved scheme of assessment for the course;
3. that there is evidence that the student was given incorrect or misleading information regarding the approved scheme of assessment for the course.

Chart 2.1: Total number of Appeals (2019-2024)

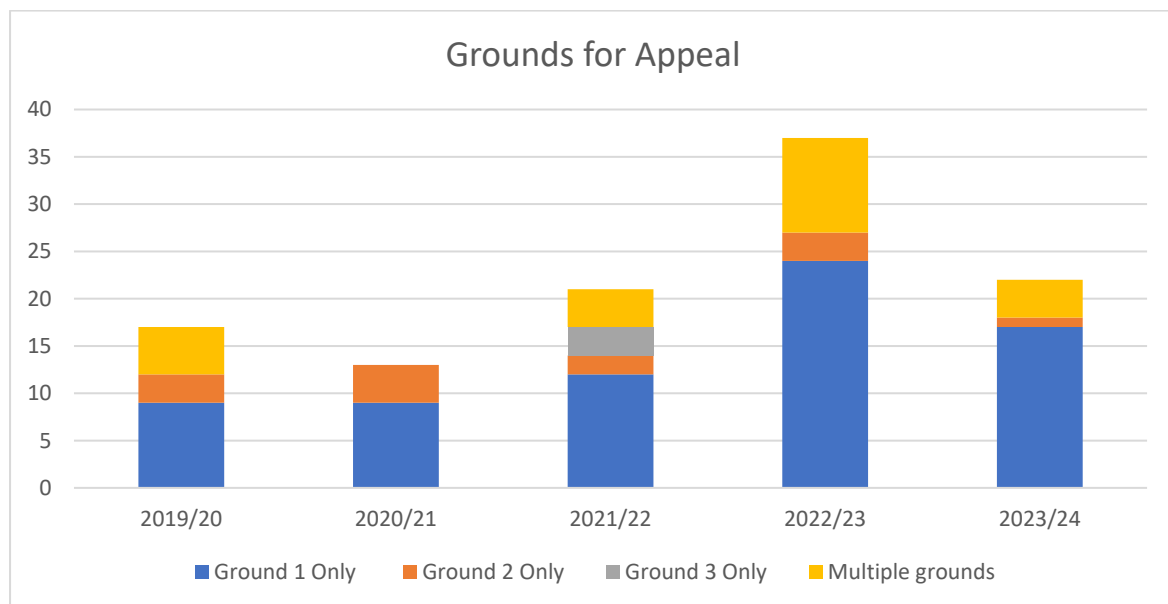


In 2023/24 all appeals were heard at the Preliminary Hearing Panel Stage. Two requests for review were received and both were dismissed. No appeals were progressed to Full Hearing or the University of Glasgow Senate Appeals Committee.

In 2023/24 the AQO received a high number of appeal intimations compared to previous years, with a reduction in the overall number of appeals heard, compared to the last academic session (2022/23). There has been an increase in complicated appeals cases, especially following the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Reassessment and Progression Boards.

Grounds for Appeal

Chart 2.2: Breakdown of the Grounds for Appeal (2019-2024)

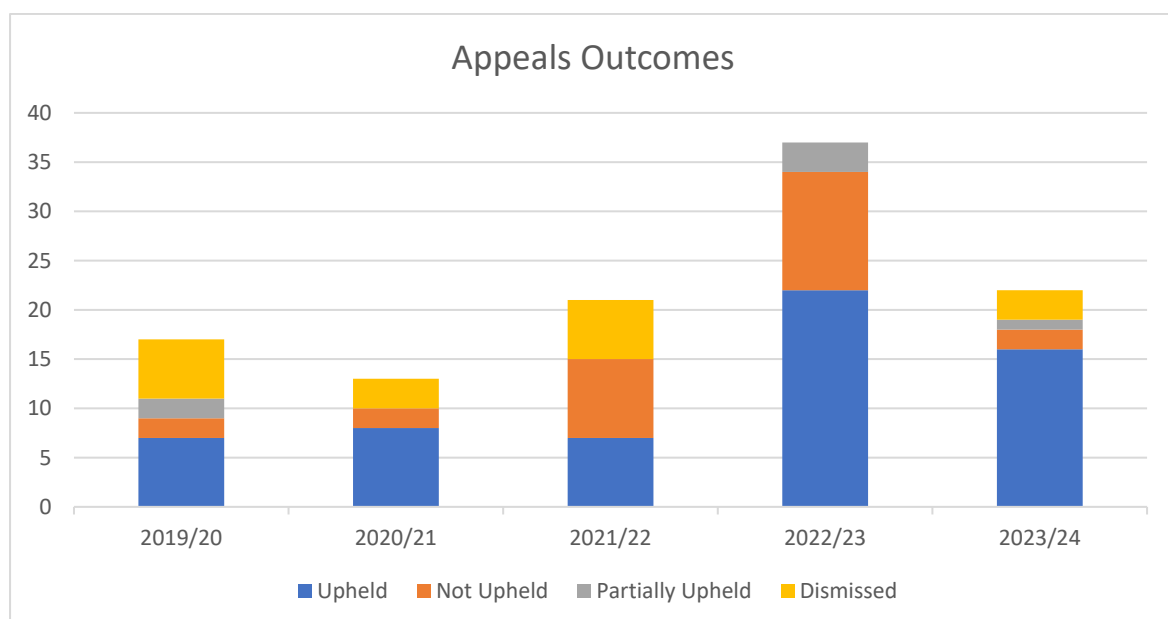


The majority of appeals in 2023/24 were heard under Ground 1 only and there has been a reduction of appeals submitted on multiple grounds.

Appeal Outcomes

Chart 2.3: Appeals Outcomes (2019-2024)

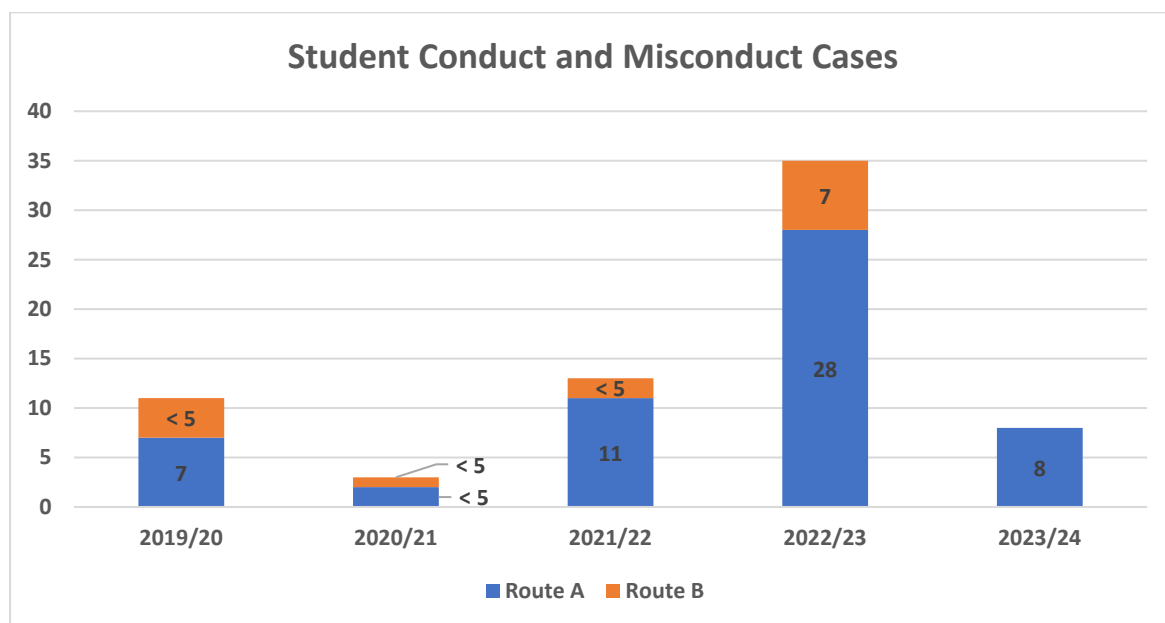
The majority of appeals that were heard in 2023/24 were upheld on Ground 1. The AQO are currently reviewing the Code of Procedure for Appeals and considering the possibility of introducing a late Good Cause process which could reduce the number of appeals heard.



3. STUDENT CONDUCT

The GSA is committed to promoting a positive and inclusive environment for work and study. Where a student fails to do so their conduct may be investigated and sanctions may be imposed. Misconduct means any behaviour which falls short of the standard expected of a student of GSA. If alleged misconduct should be investigated further, there are two available routes: Route A: Investigated and resolved by the Student Conduct Panel; or Route B: Investigated and resolved by referring to the relevant Head of School for further consideration and investigation by the Student Conduct Panel.

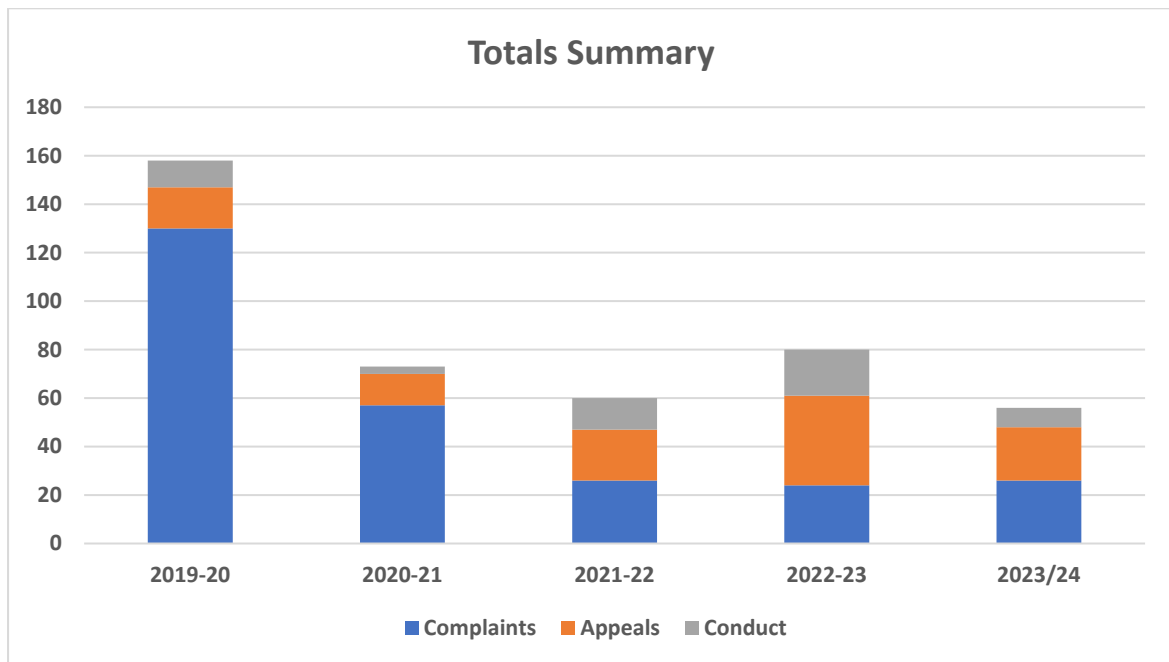
Chart 3.1: Student Conduct and Misconduct Cases (2019-2024)



In 2023/24 there was one informal investigation, dealt with at the time of the allegation and one Appeal which was upheld. No Route B Panels were convened in 2023/24 which is testament to the effectiveness of Route A Panels in resolving alleged cases of misconduct. There has been a reduction in the number of misconduct cases reported compared to 2022/23. Across the five-year period, the majority of cases relate to Plagiarism or Collusion. The emergence and increased use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and tools such as ChatGPT is being monitored across the Sector and there have been two cases of alleged misconduct as a result of mis-referencing in 2023/24.

4. SUMMARY

Chart 4.1: Complaints, Appeals and Conduct totals (2019-2024)



Overall, the total number of complaints received has stabilised between 2021-2024. The number of appeals and student misconduct cases have decreased from 2022/23, however, the cases being presented are increasingly complex.