

THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART

COVERSHEET	
To, Date:	Academic Council, 26 November 2025
Paper Author (and designation):	Kate Walklate, Senior Compliance Officer
Title of Paper:	Annual Report on SPSO Complaints, Academic Appeals and Student Conduct.
Summary of Paper:	Report on complaints, appeals and student conduct, focusing on 2024/25 academic session with contextualisation over a five-year period.
Recommendations (note/discuss/approve/ endorse):	Academic Council is invited to note the Report.
Consultation:	None required.
Risk Management:	It is essential for GSA to manage complaints, academic 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

ACADEMIC COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT TO ACADEMIC COUNCIL ON SPSO COMPLAINTS, ACADEMIC APPEALS AND STUDENT CONDUCT/ MISCONDUCT

1. INTRODUCTION

The Glasgow School of Art's (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, Academic 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, Academic Appeals and Student Conduct are provided separately, contextualising the data over a five-year period with a focus on the most recent academic session.

Going forward, the AQO will take a risk-based approach to reporting on Complaints, Appeals and Student Conduct with the Annual Report on SPSO Complaints, Academic Appeals and Student Conduct/Misconduct being the primary reporting route.

2. 2024/2025 ACADEMIC SESSION

2.1 Student Facing Professional Services Review

The Student-Facing Professional Services (SFPS) Review is one of the principal ways in which the GSA assures itself of the quality and provision delivered by its student-facing professional services. For the 2024-25 academic session the SFPS Review focused on Academic Appeals and SPSO Complaints. The Self-Evaluation Report (SER) was produced by the AQO's Senior Compliance Officer which included, but was not limited to: reflection on the operation, successes and challenges of the processes, undertaken through a review of policies, templates and outcome reports; and a review of recommendations from recent appeals and complaints.

The Review Event was held on 29 April 2025 and resulted in the following commendations:

- 1) The high-quality of the documentation submitted and the team's positive approach to the review process. The Review Panel recognised the SER as an honest and transparent self-reflection which supported the review process.
- 2) The developments undertaken to enhance the guidance and training available for staff in both processes and the team's ambition to embrace the principles of the Academic Registrar Council's Compassionate Communications Statement.
- 3) The more mindful support being put in place for complaints investigators (and those being investigated) for which positive impact was evident. Staff were complimentary about how much this has improved, particularly in light of the capacity challenges experienced by a small team. The team were commended for fostering mutually beneficial positive and strong working relationships with other departments and the GSASA. The team are clearly open to collegiate working which was evident throughout the process.
- 4) The team's positive engagement with sector activity was commended by the Review Panel, in particular for prioritising this within a small team with limited capacity.
- 5) The move to ongoing 'real-time' evaluation following conclusion of the appeal process was commended by the Review Panel for its ambition and potential to positively impact the student experience.

The review also identified areas where GSA could work collaboratively with the University of Glasgow on mutually beneficial enhancements, particularly in relation to the academic appeals process.

The recommendations have been incorporated into an Action Plan which was approved by the Planning Sub-Group on 01 September 2025 and focus on:

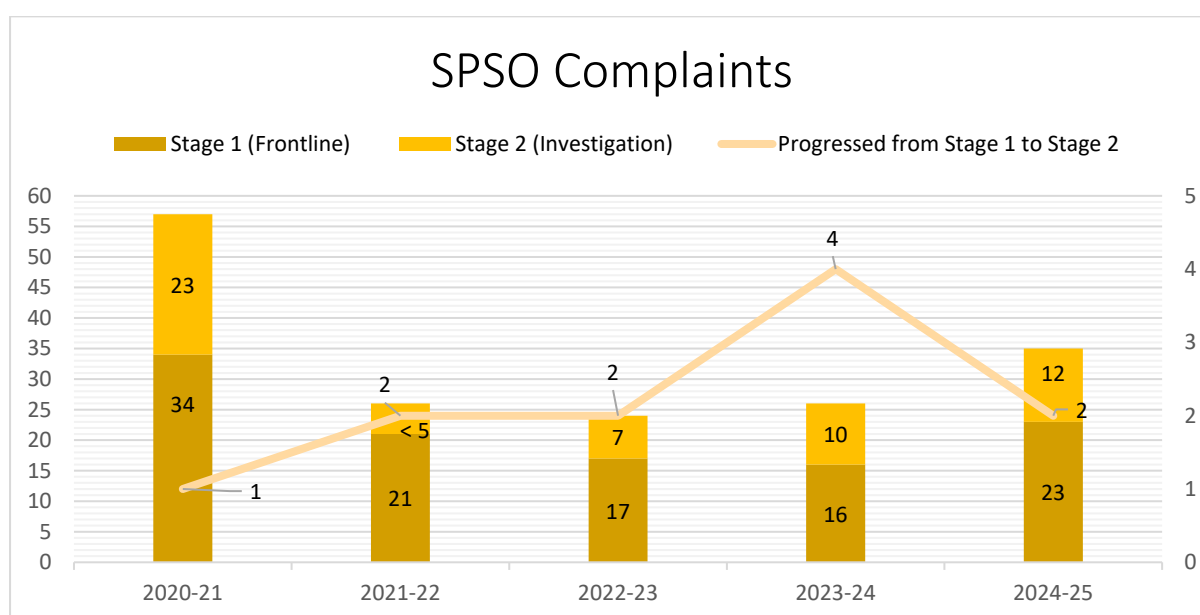
- 1) Signposting: External and Internal Sources;
- 2) Mapping the Student Journey;
- 3) Enhancements to Systems, Processes and Reporting;
- 4) Training and Support Provided to Staff;
- 5) Communications Enhancements.

Over the next 12 months, the AQO will implement the Action Plan and update Academic Council, Research Committee and Education Committee on the progress.

3. SPSO COMPLAINTS

The GSA is subject to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's (SPSO) Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP). GSA's Complaints Handling Procedure 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 3.1: Summary of SPSO Complaints (2020-2025)



Compared to the previous year, there has been an increase in the number of Stage 1 (Frontline) complaints and a small increase in the number of Stage 2 (Investigation) complaints. Of the 12 complaints investigated at Stage 2, seven of these were referred to an external investigator for consideration and related to the same theme.

There has been a reduction in the number of complaints that have progressed from Stage 1 to Stage 2. The focus on frontline resolution demonstrates that GSA's CHP is working to resolve complaints quickly and effectively.

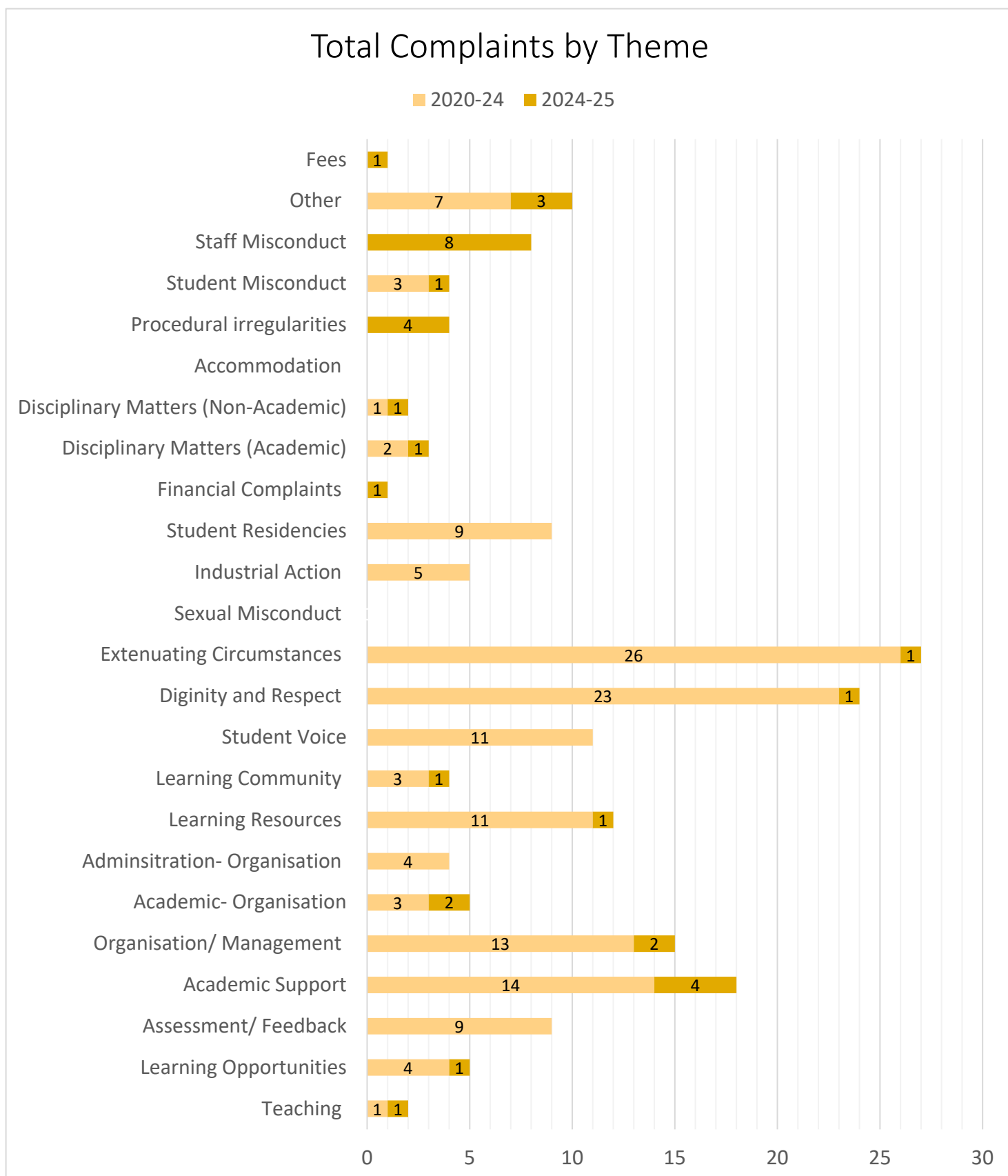
Three complaints were referred to the SPSO in 2024/25, from the same complainant. No complaints have been referred to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) since 2020/21.

There has been an increase in the total number of complaints in 2024/25, however this still remains significantly lower than the peak in sessions 2019-21, where there was a significant spike in complaints due to events such as COVID-19 and increased Industrial Action.

3.2 Complaint Themes

The current complaints register records complaint themes based on the National Student Survey (NSS) questionnaire topics, academic and non-academic themes.

Chart 3.2: Complaint Themes (2020-2025)



The highest number of complaints received in 2024/25 were in relation to alleged Staff Misconduct and Academic Support. There were no complaints received on the newly introduced theme of Race-related Harassment or Bias. On 01 September 2025 the SPSO provided an Updated Statement of Complaints Handling Principles. The revised principles are person-centred, focusing on rights-based complaints handling, ensuring that people feel heard, respected, and valued throughout the complaints process. Approaches to complaints handling should be compassionate, robust and considerate. These principles have been incorporated into the SFPS Review Action Plan.

3.3 Data Protection Complaints

The Data (Use and Access) Act (DUAA) was passed on 19 June 2025. The DUAA has introduced a statutory 'right to complain' whereby data subjects can complain to controllers if there is an infringement of the UK GDPR or Part 3 of the DPA (Law Enforcement). The Information Commissioner (ICO) has advised that institutions must have this in place by June 2026. GSA will take appropriate steps to incorporate Data Protection Complaints into the CHP.

4. ACADEMIC APPEALS

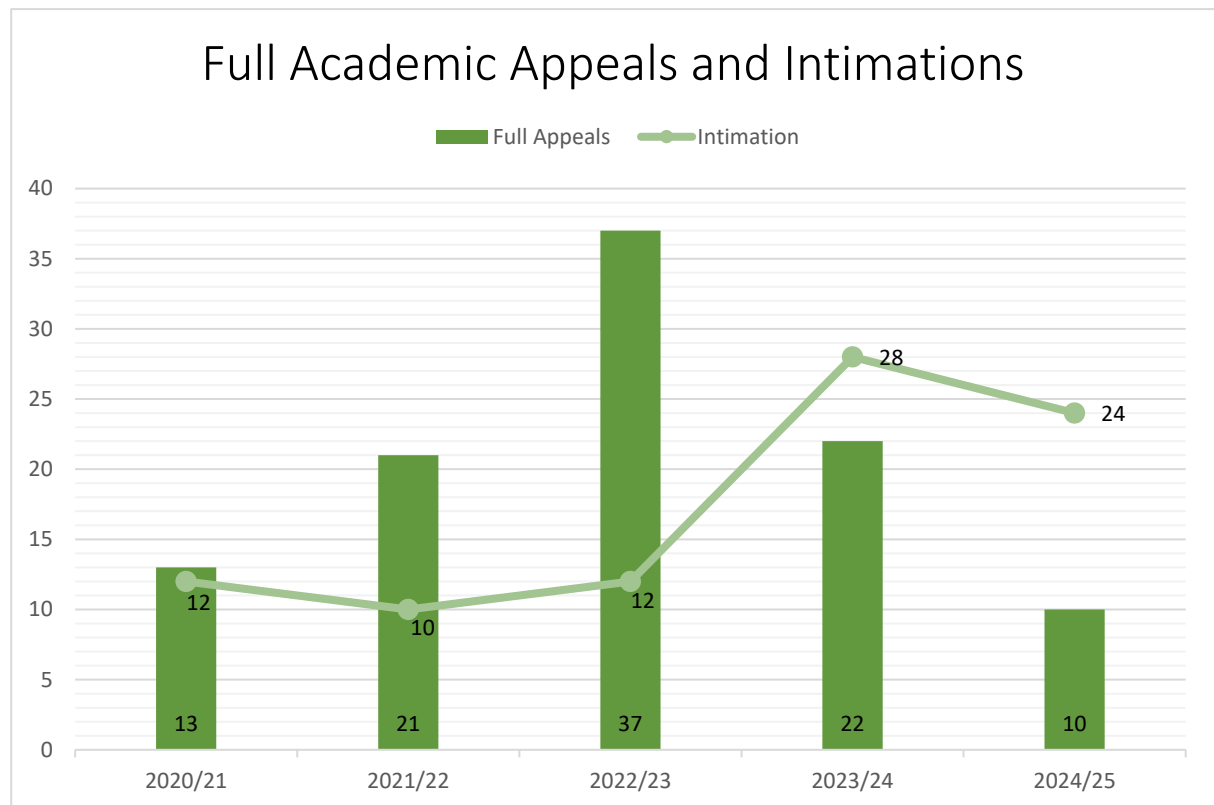
An appeal is defined as a request for a review of a decision of an academic body charged with making judgements concerning student progression, assessment or awards. By definition appeals relate to academic cases and are only applicable to enrolled students at GSA. Committee members were previously nominated by their Head of School. For the 2025/26 Academic Session the AQO asked for self-nominations for the Appeals Committee which has resulted in 21 members across the institution. The level of engagement demonstrated by the 2024/25 Appeals Committee was exemplary, reflecting a strong commitment to collective decision-making.

In 2024/25 Academic Session there was a reduction in the number of appeal intimations received and in the overall number of appeals heard at the Preliminary Hearing Stage, compared to the last academic session (2023/24). All appeals were heard at the Preliminary Hearing Stage and no review requests were progressed to the Full Hearing Stage or the University of Glasgow Senate Appeals Committee.

The number of Academic Appeals received peaked in the 2022/23 Academic Session, due to the marking boycott which was a national industrial action by the University and College Union. The gap between intimations and full appeals has widened in the last two years, demonstrating effective triage of the cases and the introduction of the Microsoft Form, making it easier for students to submit an

appeal. The intimation deadline has been removed from GSA's 2025/26 Assessment Calendar and only the full appeal deadline is listed. The change was made to ensure make the final deadline clearer for all students and staff.

Chart 4.1: Total number of Academic Appeals and Intimations (2020-2025)



4.2 Grounds for Appeal

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.

From 2020-25 the majority of appeals have been submitted on Ground 1, demonstrating that this is the primary basis for Academic Appeals.

Chart 4.2: Breakdown of the Grounds for Appeal (2020-2025)

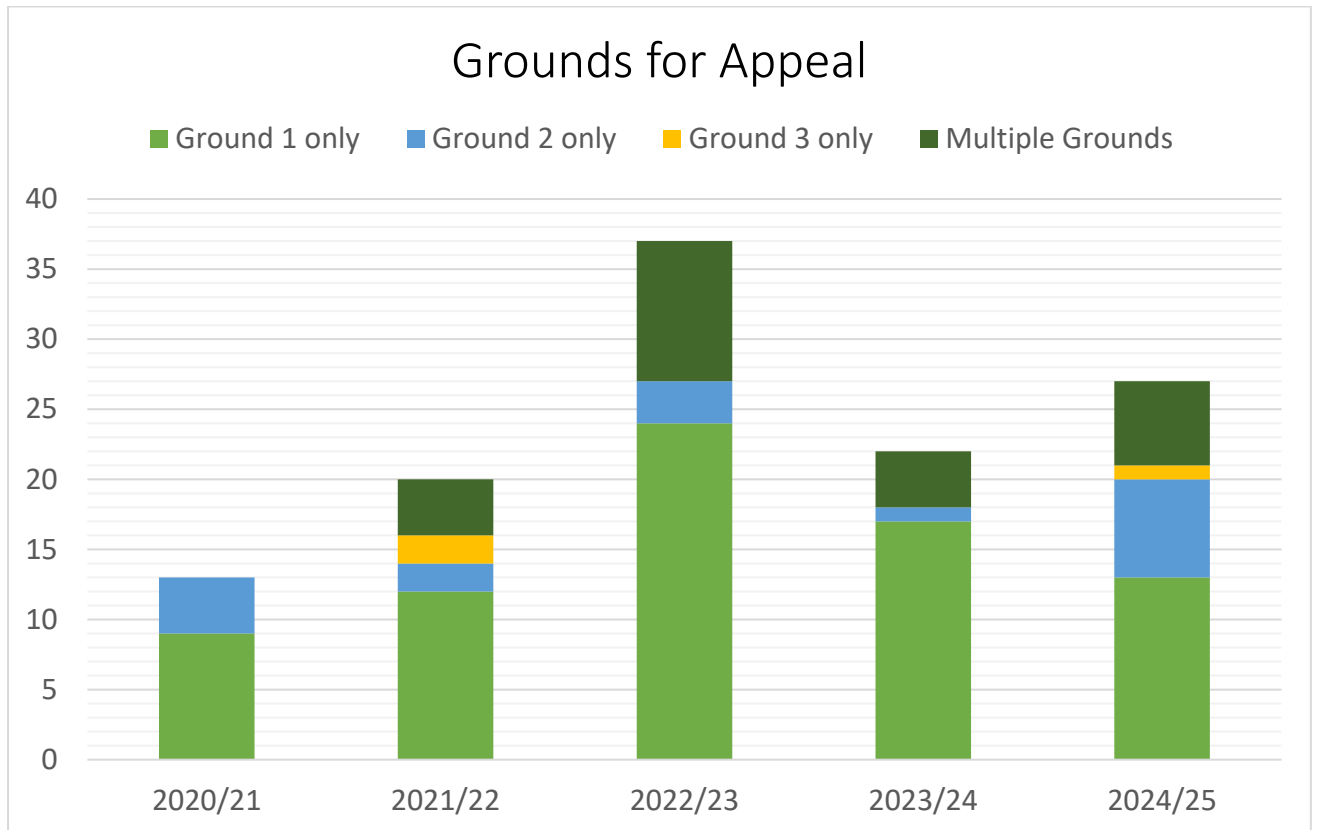
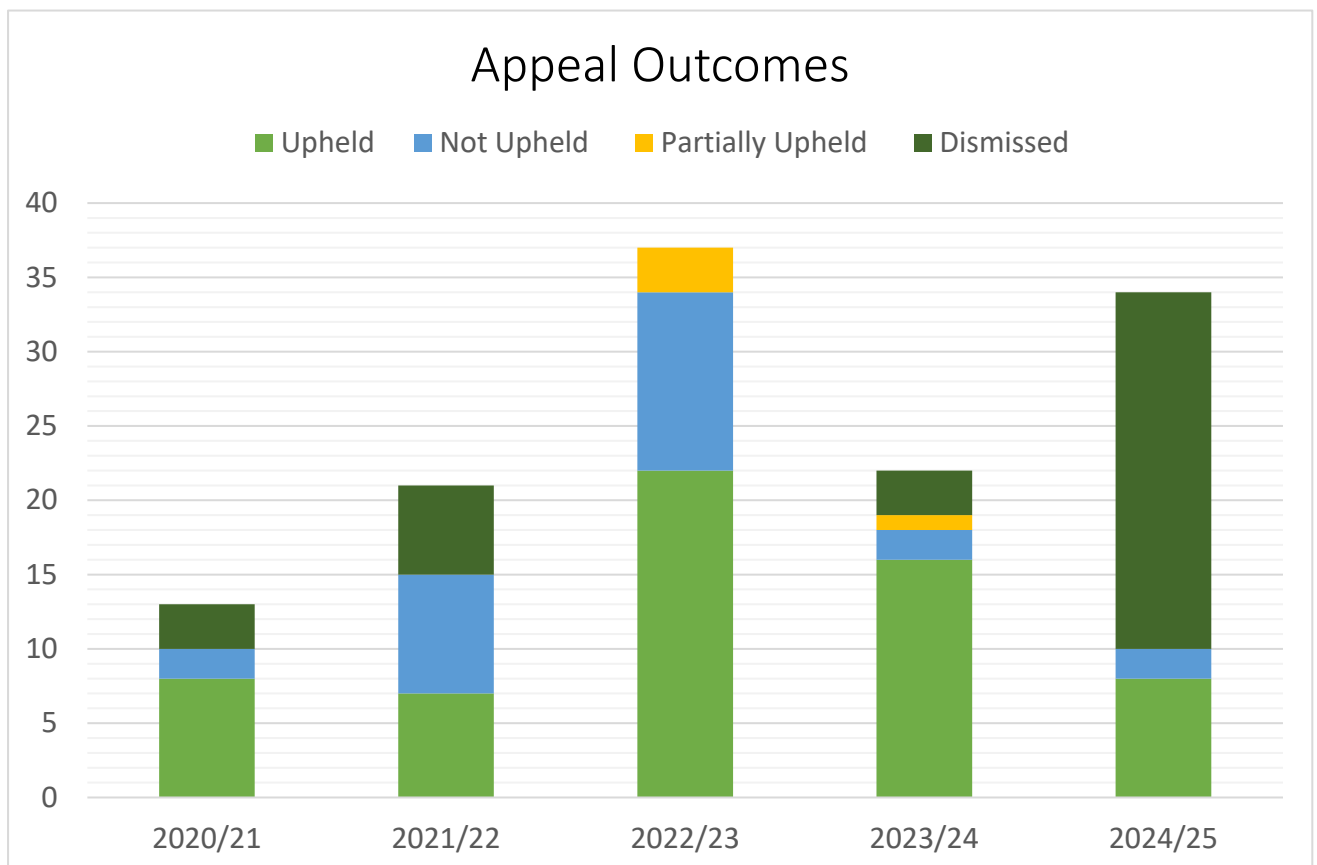


Chart 4.3: Appeals Outcomes (2020-2025)



4.3 Appeal Outcomes

Echoing the University of Glasgow Preliminary Review stage, the AQO triage all full appeals received to determine whether the appeal raises one or more competent grounds.

4.4 Withdrawal Appeals

From March-May 2025, seven appeals were received from students who had been withdrawn from GSA following unsatisfactory attendance, as outlined in the Student Attendance Policy. Of these, four were upheld, two were dismissed and one was withdrawn.

Section 6 of the Student Attendance Policy states:

Any student who has been withdrawn due to unsatisfactory attendance is entitled to appeal the decision. The appeal or intention to appeal must be submitted to Registry within 10 working days of the notification of withdrawal. Please refer to the GSA Code of Procedure for Appeals for further guidance.

Withdrawal Appeals are procedural, not academic and a number of recommendations have been forwarded to the Academic Registry to assist with the review of the Student Attendance Policy (dated 4 May 2016), namely:

- The creation of a new process for Withdrawal Appeals, which should be incorporated into the revised Student Attendance Policy. The current reference to the Code of Procedure for Appeals should be removed from the current Student Attendance Policy, ahead of the 2025/26 Academic Session.
- Introduce **specific, procedural grounds for appeal** (e.g. procedural error, previously unavailable evidence).
- Introduce an **"at risk" system**- a flagging mechanism to notify students earlier.

The appeals received highlighted a lack of clarity in communication, inconsistent probation practices, inappropriate appeal grounds and resource pressures linked to unpredictable withdrawal timings. The report recommends a comprehensive review of the Student Attendance Policy, including the development of a standalone, procedural appeals process; clearer definitions of attendance and engagement; earlier intervention mechanisms; and tailored outcomes that reflect the stage of study. It also calls for improved alignment with University of Glasgow regulations and internal policies on maximum length of study and support to study. These changes aim to ensure fairness, transparency, and better student support in managing attendance-related withdrawals.

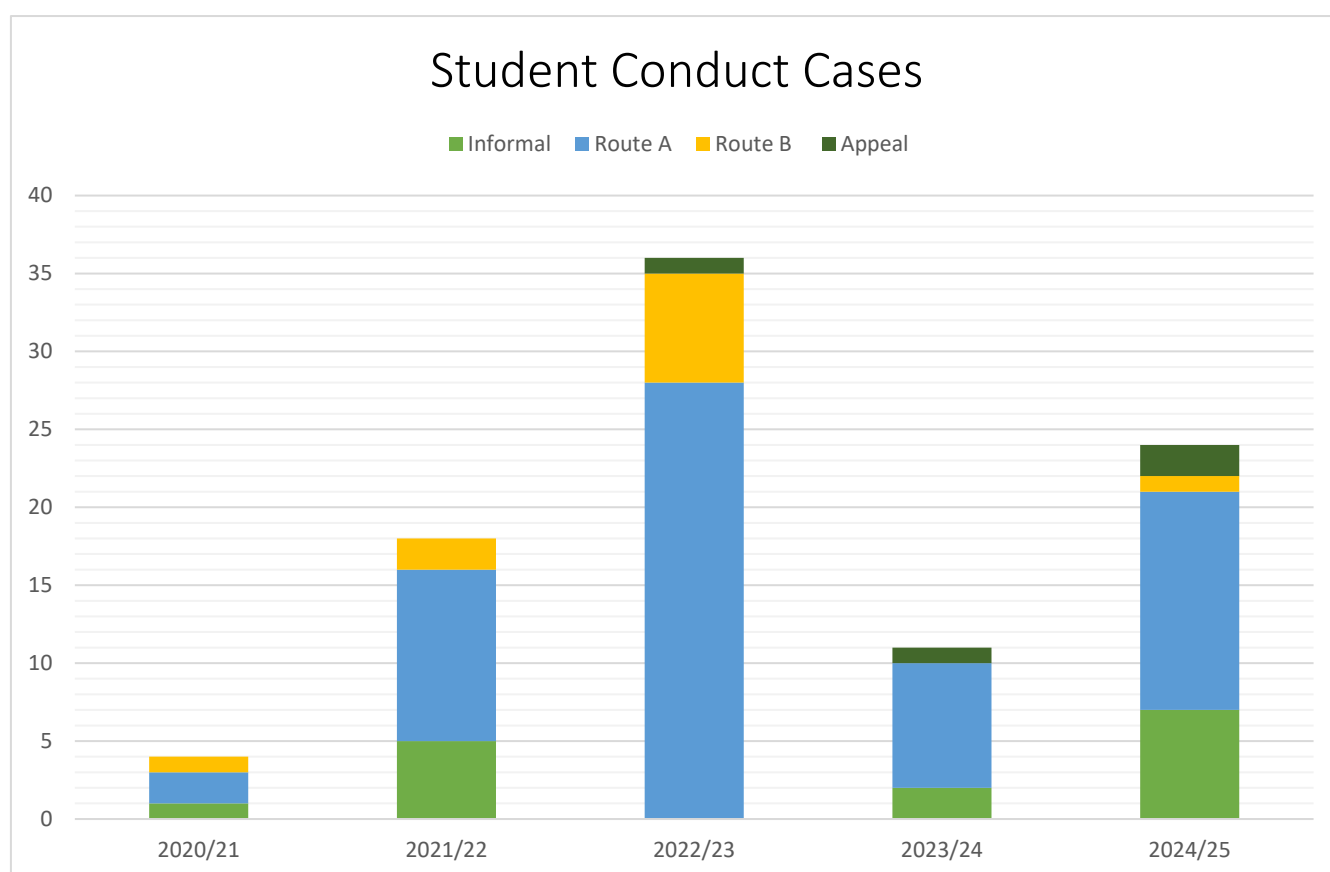
5. STUDENT CONDUCT

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. As outlined in the Student Conduct Policy and Misconduct Procedure, if alleged misconduct should be investigated further, there are three available routes:

- Informal: Misconduct dealt with at the time of the allegation;
- Route A: Investigated and resolved by the Student Conduct Panel;
- Route B: Investigated and resolved by referring to the relevant Head of School for further consideration and investigation by the Student Conduct Panel.

Only the student who was the subject of the alleged misconduct is able to lodge an appeal against any decision/outcome made under the Student Conduct Policy.

Chart 5.1: Student Conduct and Misconduct Cases (2020-2025)



In 2024/25 there were seven informal investigations, dealt with at the time of the allegation. The majority of cases over the past five-years have been investigated at Route A, which demonstrates the

effectiveness of this stage in resolving alleged cases of misconduct. Overall, there has been a significant increase in the number of misconduct cases reported compared to 2023/24.

5.2 Student Conduct Review

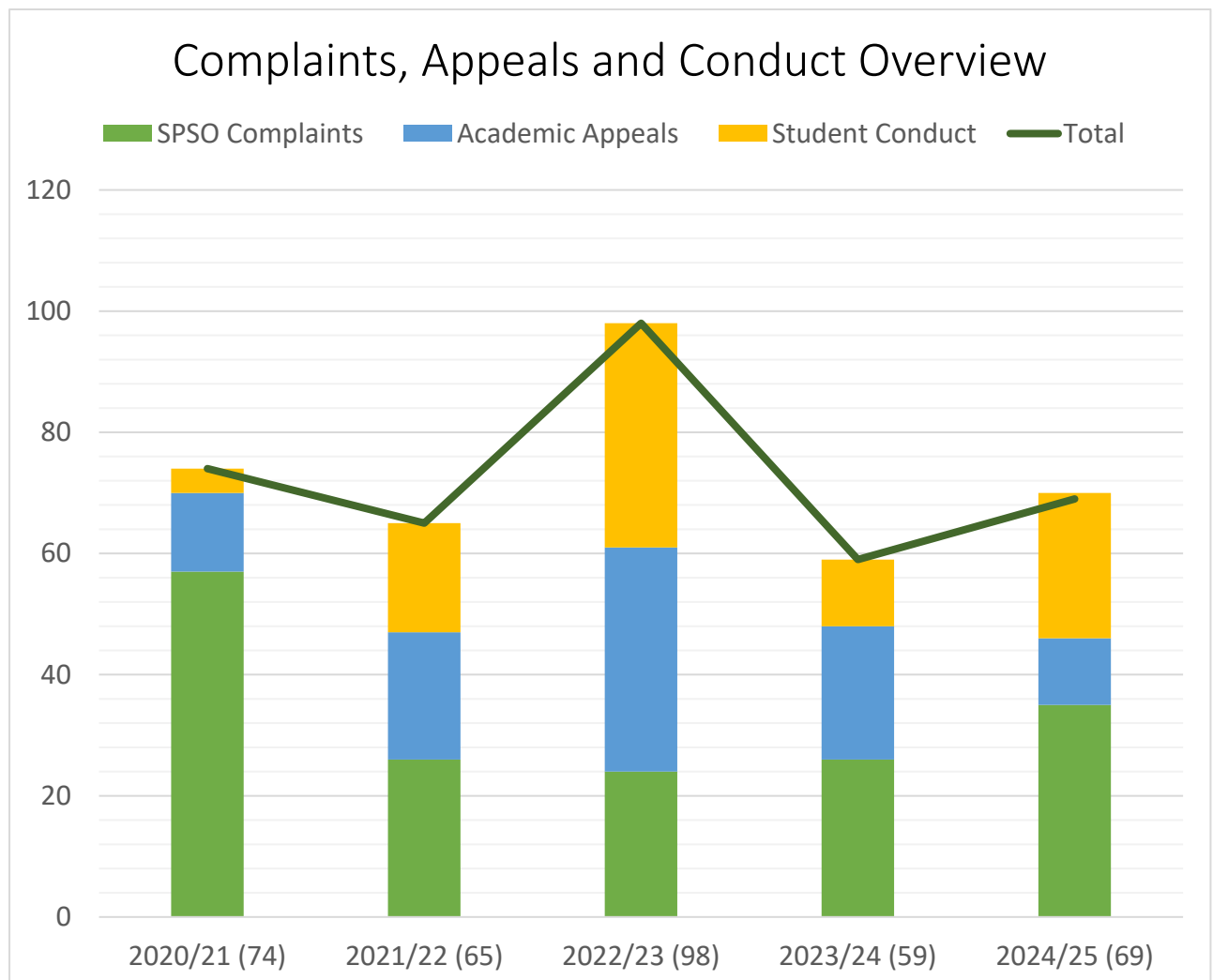
In academic session 2025/26, the AQO will conduct a full review of the Student Conduct Policy and Misconduct Procedure, which was approved in October 2021. A Short-Life working group (SLWG) has been established with representatives from across the GSA and GSASA. The working group will review the existing policy and identify areas for enhancement and recommendations for improvement. The review will result in the creation of two separate procedures, Academic Misconduct and Non-Academic Misconduct. Under each procedure it is anticipated that there will be three stages:

- 1) Early Intervention/ Caution
- 2) Misconduct Investigation
- 3) Student Conduct Committee.

These procedures will be coordinated by the AQO with support from the relevant Academic School and/or Support area.

6. SUMMARY

Chart 6.1: Complaints, Appeals and Conduct overview (2020-2025)



Overall, there was an increase in reported complaints and student conduct cases in the 2024/25 academic session, when compared with the previous year. Across all the compliance processes there has been an increase in the complexity of cases and resources required. Chart 6.1 illustrates the fluctuations across the five-year period.

There will be a focus on completing the SFPS Review Action Plan and the review of the Student Conduct Policy and Misconduct Procedure in the 2025/26 Academic Session.