

2024-25 Feedback & Complaints Annual Report

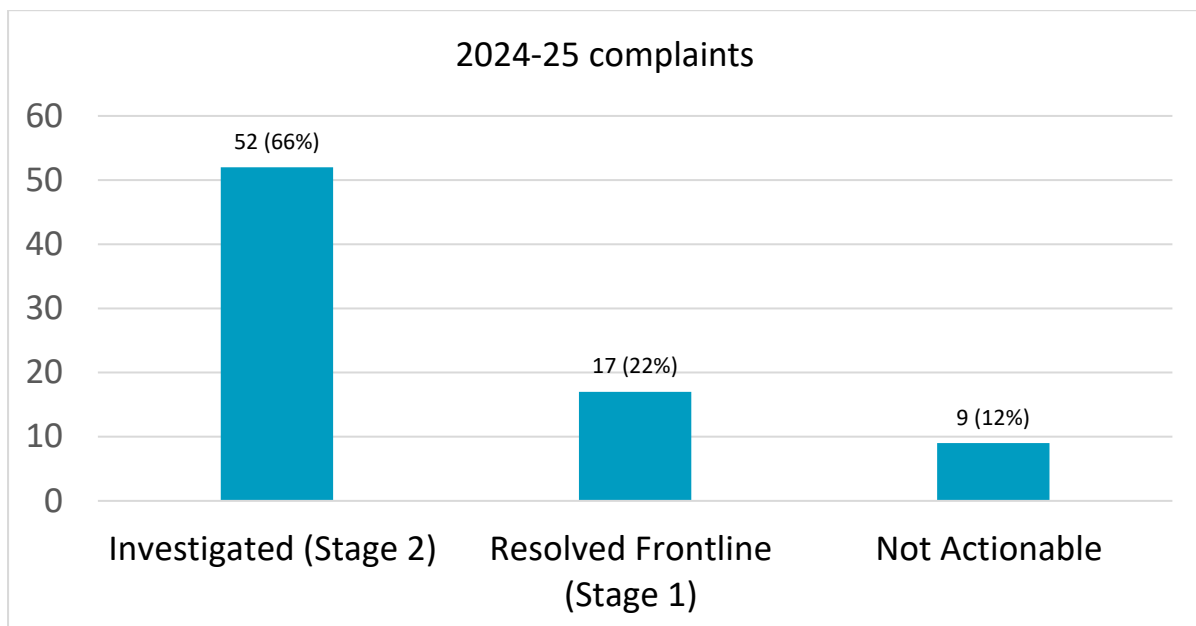
2024-25 Performance Data

During the year 2024-25 we received 78 formal complaints, 76 because of children's hearings. This represents a 37% increase from 2023-24. Two complaints were about operational issues within CHS.

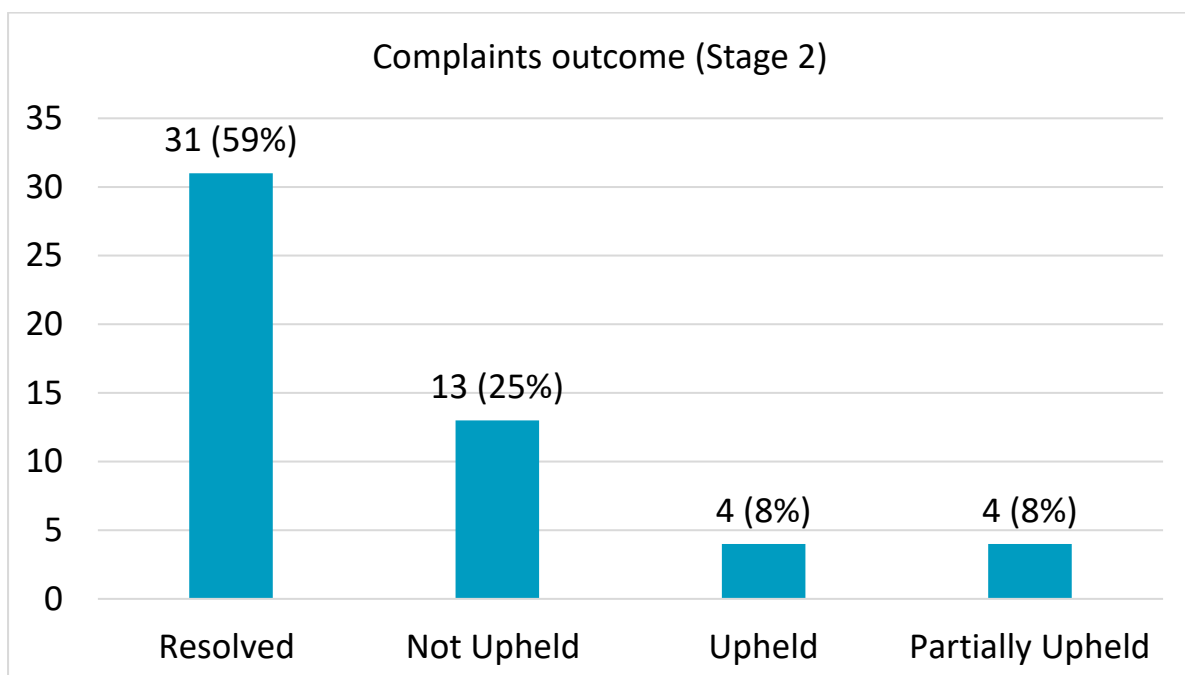
Data

We have produced our complaints data for 2024-25 in the following charts.

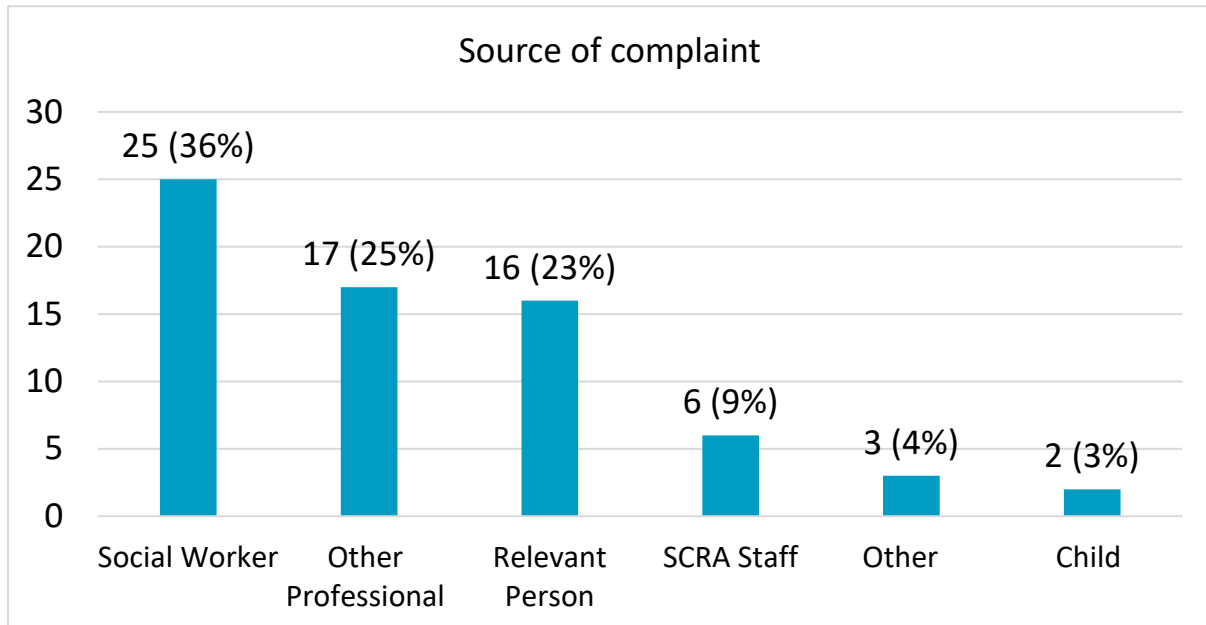
Total complaints received (2024-25)



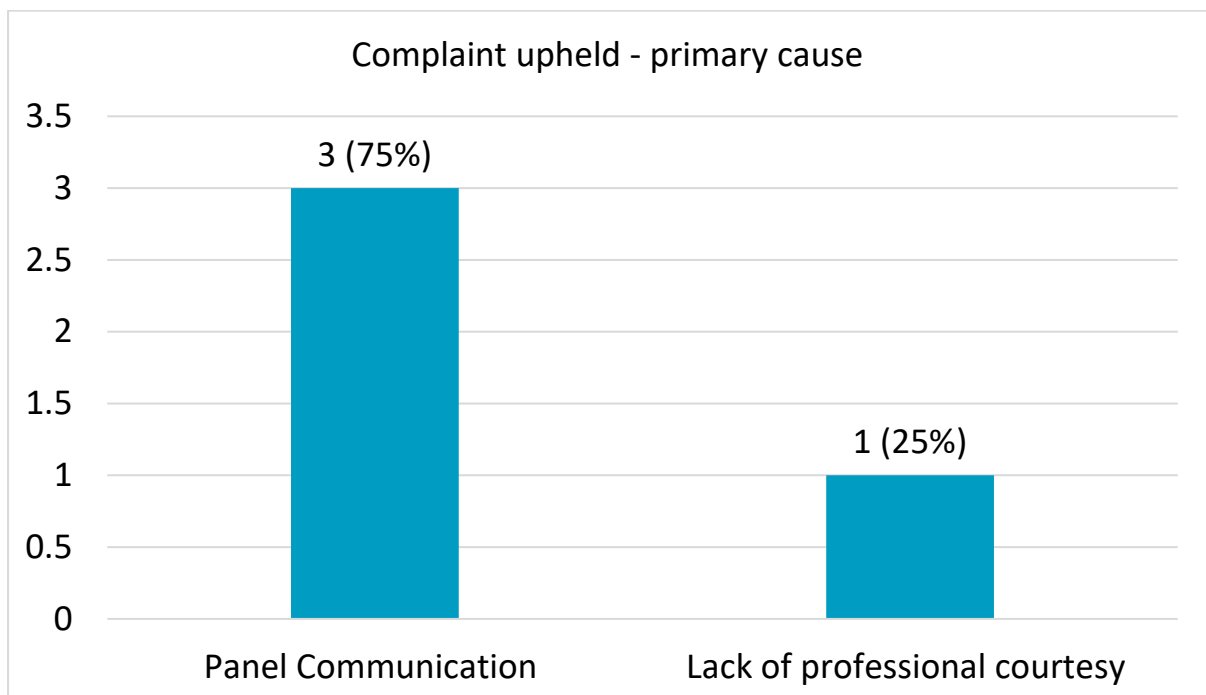
Complaint outcomes



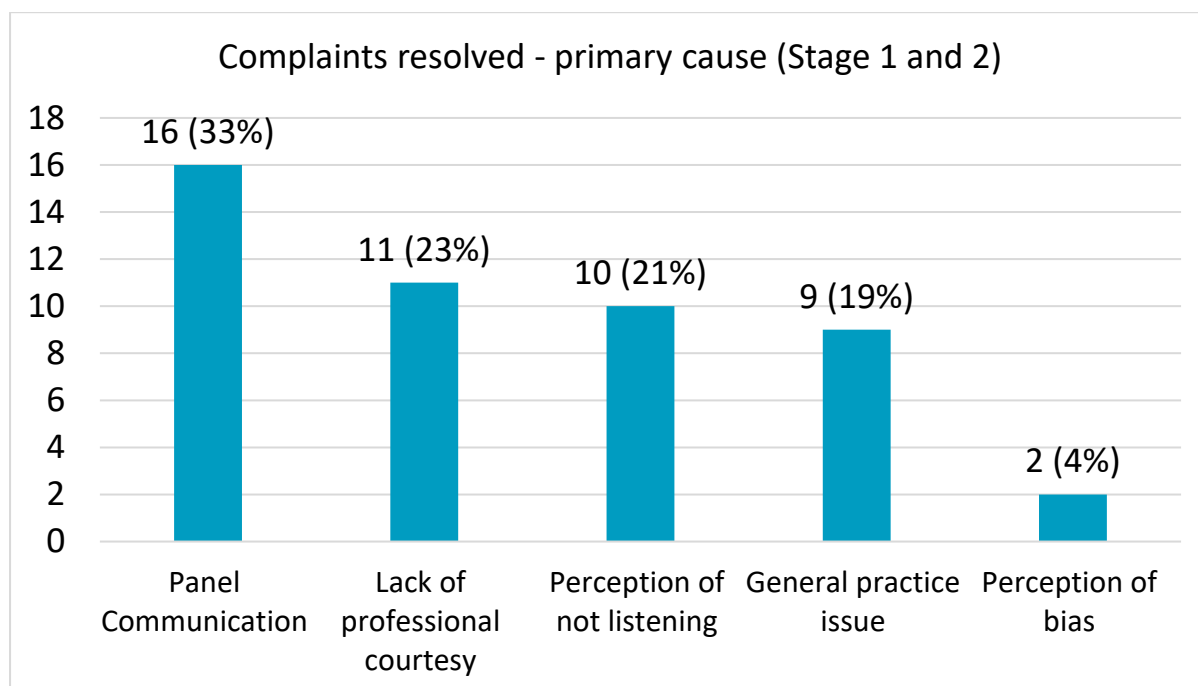
Source of complaint



Primary cause of upheld complaints



Primary cause of resolved complaints



Service developments and quality assurance

Most complaints are handled by the CHS Feedback and Complaints team, and they go through a rigorous peer review and for every Stage 2 complaint. There is a formal sign-off process by a senior member of staff for all Stage 2 determinations.

CHS regional teams provide a consistent and enhanced management support structure for volunteer Panel Members. This has a positive effect on feedback and complaints because on a regional basis, we have seen an increase in reported complaints. We believe that under the previous volunteer manager set up there were similar levels of dissatisfaction but that were not reported to the national team, and therefore learning from complaints was more limited. They are now identified and acted upon more quickly and consistently than

had previously been the case, with referrals made to the central Feedback and Complaints team as appropriate.

Themes, trends, lessons learnt and improvements

We have identified key themes arising from feedback and complaints during the year.

Communication

Panel Member communication remains a significant cause of complaints as it was in 2023-24. This can be broken down as follows.

Tone and manner

This is a fairly broad category but in the main it is where Panel Members have been perceived to be rude or dismissive towards others in the hearing. It can also apply to body language such as facial expressions, sighing or generally being dismissive of the views of others. We also see examples of lack of trauma informed language both in relation to children and to parents who may themselves have suffered trauma.

Lack of professional courtesy

This situation often arises when Panel Members become frustrated at a perceived lack of progress or if reports or information provided are felt to be inadequate. This can be frustrating for Panel Members, but it is important that the hearing remains inquisitorial and not confrontational with questions being posed with appropriate professionalism. Equally, it is important that

professionals understand that part of the role of the panel is to question their views and recommendations so that the panel can be satisfied that they can make the best decision for the child at that time.

General practice issue

Complaints about practice often relate to hearing management where the Chair of a hearing may have encountered difficulties managing disruptive or aggressive attendees who continually interrupt the proceedings. This can sometimes result in others feeling vulnerable or that they are not being protected by the Chair from verbal abuse. In cases where domestic abuse is an issue, this may create a state of fear or alarm for the victim or prevent them from speaking openly. This can also refer to situations where one individual may have felt they did not have enough time to give their view in relation to others.

Perception of not being listened to

These complaints arise where someone believes that the panel is not listening to their view. Often these complaints are made by relevant persons who may misunderstand the purpose of the hearing and seek to address historical issues or use the hearing as a platform to air wider grievances which have no direct relevance to the purpose of the hearing on that day. Where issues are relevant, the panel may simply have decided to base their decision on the balance of the information that has been presented, rather than being the case that they have not listened to an individual. It may be that they do not agree, which is of course a legitimate part of the hearing outcome.

Perception of bias

Generally this is where someone believes they are being treated unfairly. This may be due to one individual not being allowed the same amount of time in the hearing to give their views as another or where the tone and manner of the Panel towards one person is believed to be markedly different towards another.

Improvements

We continue to use the complaints process to analyse what we learn from complaints and look to enhance what we already do to support and develop Panel Member practice. This includes:

- Our Complaints Management Officer attends Regional Delivery Manager meetings monthly to update on complaints and provide detailed information to support their regional activities in feedback and complaints.
- Providing monthly reports to each of the nine Tribunal Delivery Managers containing analysis of complaints received.
- We continue to provide learning sessions in trauma awareness so that our Panel Members can use that insight sensitively and appropriately in children's hearings.
- We share insights from complaints so that they feed into our quality function, enhance our learning offering and complement our [Practice and Procedure Manual](#).
- We have developed a standard operating procedure guidance to cover the relationship between the Feedback and Complaints team and the regional teams. This ensures that all feedback and complaints are

identified and addressed in a consistent way across all of our nine regions as well as by our Edinburgh-based team.

- We have developed and enhanced a suite of templates for use by regional teams to either address complaints or refer to the Feedback and Complaints team appropriately.
- We have introduced a leaflet for children and young people so that they can be more confident about making a complaint to CHS to mitigate a concern held by some children that a complaint would impact on future decision making and the services they receive.
- In response to feedback from Panel Members who have been the subject of complaints we have developed a guide for our Panel Members who may be the subject of a complaint. This helps them to understand the process and what support they can expect.
- We have delivered learning and development sessions for our regional teams so that they have a clearer understanding of the complaints procedure and what their role is within it.
- We provide quarterly reports providing analysis of feedback and complaints to the Board's Audit and Risk Committee to ensure appropriate oversight and governance.
- We continue to work collaboratively with our Participation Team to ensure that children and young people continue to be consulted about what we are doing and that they have an opportunity to express their views, provide feedback and co-design activity and resources with us.
- We work closely with advocacy providers in Scotland so that children and young people can provide their feedback or make a complaint if they want to do so.

Support

Participating in and managing hearings can be challenging. If a complaint is made about a Panel Member or other volunteer, that can be a stressful experience for them. We have an extensive support package in place to look after the wellbeing of our volunteers and to provide any support that they may need.

Each of our nine regional teams has a Wellbeing Coordinator who can make sure that Panel Members are properly supported.

We have a suite of templates and support materials to enhance the understanding of staff and volunteers of effective complaints handling and the support they can access when they are involved in a complaint.

In addition, volunteers have access to the range of external services provided by Health Assured, a confidential wellbeing support service which includes counselling, health, and wellbeing services.

Feedback

We know that children and young people can often be reluctant to make a complaint or provide feedback as they can be concerned there could be adverse consequences for them if they are critical about their experience. We also know that often where a young person wants to provide their views, they would prefer to do that by speaking with someone, rather than to have to fill out a form or write something down. We continue to develop and implement

plans to encourage young people to engage with us and to tell us about their experiences.

Our postcard pilot operated during the year in three of our regions. A Panel Member gave the child a postcard which contained a QR code. This led to a portal which allowed the child to provide feedback to either CHS, [SCRA](#) or [Children First](#) without them having to work out which organisation to contact.

We took the decision to close the pilot during 2024-25, and plans are in place to replace this. The QR code from the postcard is due to be transitioned across to the letters that the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) send to children before and after their hearing. This means that all children who have a hearing will be able to provide feedback or make a complaint if they want to do so. This work has been delayed slightly, and the new letters are expected to be introduced by SCRA towards the end of 2025. The pilot operated in a number of areas resulting in 12 items of feedback.

We also received feedback during the year from work undertaken directly with children and young people. The feedback has been quite mixed with some children telling us how well they felt their hearing had gone, whereas others did not have such a positive experience.

We receive feedback from professionals and families as a result of our work on complaints and via our online portal amounting to around 40 responses. We continue to work to promote those feedback channels and encourage their use by children and young people primarily, so that we can continue to improve on those numbers.

We produced a [blog](#) for Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights) explaining the work that we had done to support and encourage children and young people to give us feedback or make a complaint.

Feedback can be provided anonymously but where a child has provided contact details and indicated that they are happy to be contacted we will reach out to them. We also make sure that feedback is shared within the Panel Members. The feedback helps us to identify where things are going well and learn from what may not have gone so well, so that we can make improvements.

We have developed plans which will mean that we are working more closely with our regional colleagues to obtain feedback from children and professionals who engage at a local level. That will be through our regular engagement with organisations supporting professionals who attend hearings as well as through our colleagues who participate in local Champs Boards. A Champs Board is a collaborative forum where care-experienced young people work directly with adult decision-makers to improve the care system and advocate for change.

We will also be extending our reach into advocacy providers to work more closely with them so that we can hear first-hand about the experience that children have at their hearing. We know from experience that advocacy workers are an invaluable source of information about a child's hearing experience.

Whistleblowing Policy

The [CHS Whistleblowing Policy](#) is available to all employees and ex-employees of CHS who have concerns relating to the delivery of CHS frontline services, the health and safety of employees or visitors, or the impairment of the viability or integrity of CHS.

We will detail any reports of whistleblowing in our annual complaints report along with any actions taken over postcards. There were no reports of whistleblowing during this reporting period.