

15 November 2023

Review of feedback and complaints – 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

Executive Summary

The attached paper provides a summary of the feedback received between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023. It breaks down the complaints received across the departments, detailing the performance against service standards, and identifies themes in Registration and Fitness to Practise complaints. It also includes examples of positive feedback.

A report of this feedback, including a summary of every upheld and partially upheld complaint and response is compiled monthly and presented to ELT. Detailed monthly reports are sent to the relevant department heads, which always includes the Heads of Fitness to Practise and Registration Departments.

Previous consideration	None
Decision	The Committee is asked to discuss the report. No decision is required
Next steps	None
Strategic priority	Strategic priority 2: Ensure our communication and engagement activities are proactive, effective and informed by the views of our stakeholders.
Financial and resource implications	A new complaint management system is being sought which may have financial implications.
EDI impact	Tracking trends in complaints enables us to monitor and identify if there are any EDI issues which we need to address.
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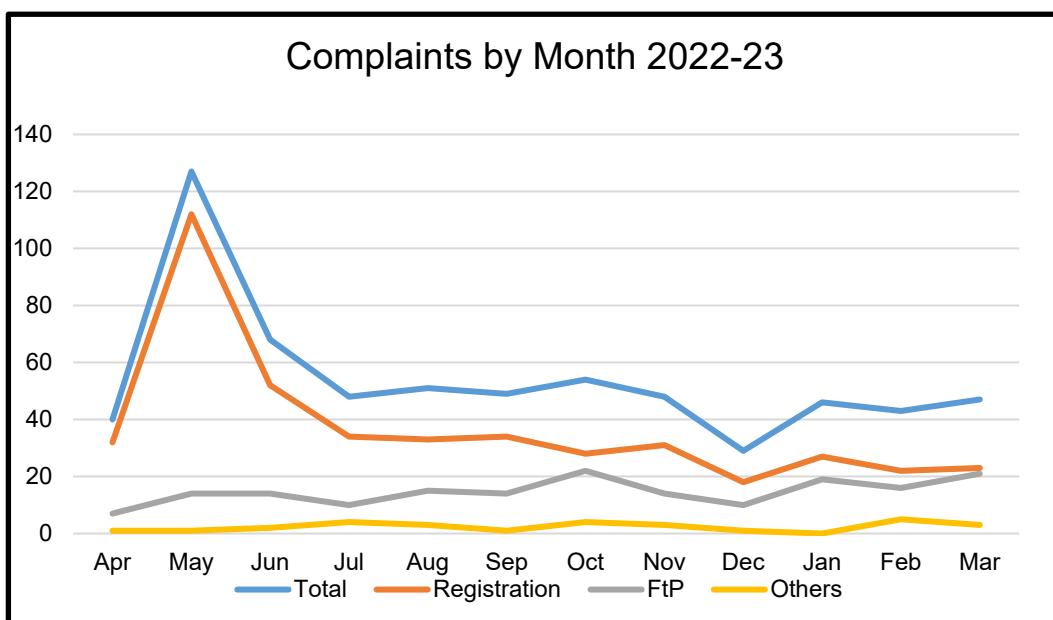
Annual review of feedback and complaints – 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report is a summary of complaints and feedback that the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) received between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023.
- 1.2. The Service and Complaints Manager manages the customer feedback received across the organisation in accordance with our Customer Service Policy and Process. Requests for information and general comments about processes and procedures are also logged and reported on.
- 1.3. This report provides a review of the feedback and complaints received during the period and the main themes in complaints, learning identified, and changes made as a result of feedback. Examples of positive feedback are also included.

2. Complaints received 1 April 2022 - 31 March 2023

- 2.1. The table below shows the number of complaints received each month by department.



- 2.2. 650 complaints were received during the reporting period, an average of 54 per month. This compares with 708 complaints at an average of 59 per month during 2021-22 and represents an 8% decrease. This is despite receiving 127 complaints in May 2022 primarily related to physiotherapist renewal, which is the highest monthly number of complaints ever received. These complaints were largely not upheld.

2.3. The vast majority of complaints received were about functions and activities carried out by the Registration and FTP departments, which received 69% and 27% of the complaints respectively. This compares to 71% and 26% of the complaints respectively in the previous period. This is the same every year as they are the most public facing departments.

2.4. The Registration department had challenges in relation to the high volume of international applications received. We also saw a spike in complaints related to physiotherapist renewal.

3 Performance against Service Standards

3.1 Our service level is 15 working days to provide a substantive response to complaints from the date of receipt. In June 2020 we introduced a new internal complaint handling process to both assess the complaints received according to priority and improve our performance against service standard.

3.2 We closed 492 complaints within our service level, which represents 77% of complaints to which we replied. This is less than the 84% replied to within service level during the previous reporting year.

3.3 The deterioration in performance was largely down to the significant increase in complaints received in certain areas, such as regarding international applications, which stretched the capacity of managers to respond during busy months. There was also a bulk of renewal related complaints from physiotherapists received in one month which impacted on response times. There were managerial changes in FTP which also impacted on their response times. We tried to provide some mitigation against this by escalating some complaints to managers who were not ordinarily first stage responders.

3.4 45 of the 99 complaints that Registration responded to outside service level occurred in one month. 92 of these occurred in the first 4 months of the period with only 7 missing the service level in the last 8 months.

- Registration responded to 78% of complaints within 15 working days, which was greatly impacted by the first four months.
- The complaints that FTP responded to outside service level occurred more evenly throughout the period, but their overall response rate increased to 75% within 15 working days compared to 70% in the previous period.

3.5 The mean response time during the period was 11 working days and the median response time 10 working days. This compares with 10 and 8 working days respectively in the previous period and was impacted by the first four months in Registration.

3.6 The service level compliance challenges have continued into 2023. This is especially in the FTP department where there is a shortage of complaint responders relating to the investigation function, due to a number of the managers who respond to complaints leaving the HCPC.

4 Professional Standards Authority

- 4.1 In 2019-20 the PSA introduced a new standard focussing on regulators addressing concerns identified about it, including through feedback received from stakeholders. We have continued to meet this standard since its introduction, including in their 2023 report. We record where we undertake changes as a result of feedback and provide evidence requested by the PSA when carrying out their annual review.
- 4.2 The Service and Complaints Manager contributed to the PSA working group and is part of a Healthcare Regulators Complaints Forum.

5 Learning from complaints

- 5.1 Where complaints are upheld, apologies are given and as far as is possible remedial action is taken. Where the complaint identifies a systemic issue, corrective action is taken, and we seek to learn from what went wrong to prevent a recurrence.
- 5.2 During this review period, a number of corrective actions and learning points have resulted from complaints or feedback. The following are examples:
 - An auto-response was added to the ‘priority reg’ and readmissions email in-boxes in the Registration department.
 - The Registration department set up joint Registration and FTP triage meetings to consider health declarations made in applications. This was to ensure that applications which do not need to go to FTP were not referred there, to avoid unnecessary delays for applicants.
 - The Registration department set up a work queue to escalate queries to specific teams and to management. This was to ensure that application enquiries are dealt with in a timely manner and reduce the potential for issues to be missed.
 - The Web team updated an image on the website so that it more accurately reflected the registrant group it was intended to represent.
 - The Web team updated the customer service feedback page website to change the reference from standard of acceptance to threshold criteria.

5.3 Most learning from complaints is departmental specific.

- One theme which has been cross-organisational, particularly in relation to the Registration and FTP departments, is the negative impact on stakeholders when they are unable to contact the organisation by telephone or get responses to emails, or when their calls are not returned as promised.

- Another theme which has been a consistent theme across the organisation was the tone and content of correspondence. This was addressed through a tone of voice review in the FTP department of key correspondence templates and feedback about this will be kept under review to see if it has had a positive effect.

5.4 Monthly complaint reports are disseminated to the Heads of the departments that receive complaints during the month, which contains a summary of every complaint received during that month and themes of complaints received. The Executive Leadership Team also receives a monthly complaints summary report. Where feedback identifies serious systemic errors, these are included in the near miss reports and improvement log.

6 Complaint themes

6.1 This section provides further details about the main areas of negative feedback received during the review period. The themes of complaints have remained largely consistent with previous years.

6.2 *Fitness to Practise*

The majority of complaints about FTP processes were received from members of the public who were usually complainants in FTP cases, followed by registrants as the second most common source. Complaints were also received from registrant representatives, employers, and other parties in FTP cases.

- **Pre-Investigating Committee Panel (ICP) threshold decisions.** Complaints related to cases where the FTP Department had deemed that a concern or concerns raised by the complainant against a registrant did not reach the threshold for referral to an Investigating Committee Panel (ICP).
- **Communication.** Complaints received from parties in a case about a lack of updates from case managers and responses to emails or telephone calls.
- **Transparency.** Complainants from parties to a case about not being informed of a change in case manager.
- **Delay.** Complaints received from both complainants and registrants in FTP cases regarding the length of time taken to make a decision as to whether the concerns raised meet the threshold for referral to an ICP.
- **Case handling** Complaints from parties to an investigation that it has been outsourced to external solicitors.
- **Readmission.** Complaints from applicants about the delays in dealing with declarations made in readmission applications which are referred to FTP.

6.3 HCPTS

- **Management of Hearings.** Complaints from registrants, complainants and witnesses about the scheduling of hearings and of adjournments.
- **Conduct of hearings.** Complaints from parties about the conduct of the hearing, issues relating to evidence, and the outcome of hearings.
- **Notice of hearings.** Complaints from representatives of registrants that notices of hearings are being sent directly to the registrant when they are on record as acting in the case.
- **Website.** Complaints that decisions published on the HCPC website are inaccurate or have not been appropriately redacted.

6.4 Registration

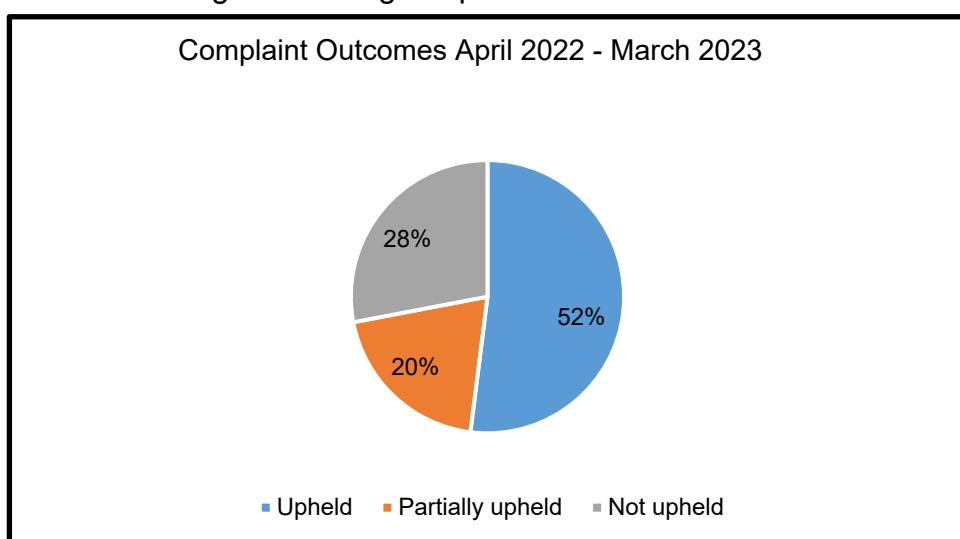
The vast majority of complaints about the Registration Department come from applicants and registrants, but some also come from employers or prospective employers.

- **Registration renewal.** Registrants' main concerns were around difficulties accessing the portal to complete online renewal. Registrants also complained that they did not receive email reminders of renewal and that we no longer sent renewal reminders by post.
- **UK applicants.** Applicants' main concerns were delays in registration due to pass list issues or a referral to FTP.
- **International application process and processing times.** Applicants' main concerns related to the time that their application took to be processed, a lack of updates and delays with the initial and final outcomes of their application.
- **International applications – documents.** Registrants complained that documents they submitted had not been assigned to their application.
- **International applications.** Applicants complained of delays in processing verification requests.
- **International applications.** Applicants complained of a lack of consistency in that contemporaries applying for registration had not been asked to provide further information, but they have.
- **IELTS tests.** Complaint from applicants that they are being asked to provide an IELTS test.
- **Communication.** Difficulties in getting through to the Department by telephone and delays in responding to emails or in not getting a response.

- **Fees.** Complaints that registrants on maternity leave cannot suspend their registration or pay a reduced fee.
- **Refunds.** Delays in refunding overpayments of fees or refunds due on voluntarily deregistering.

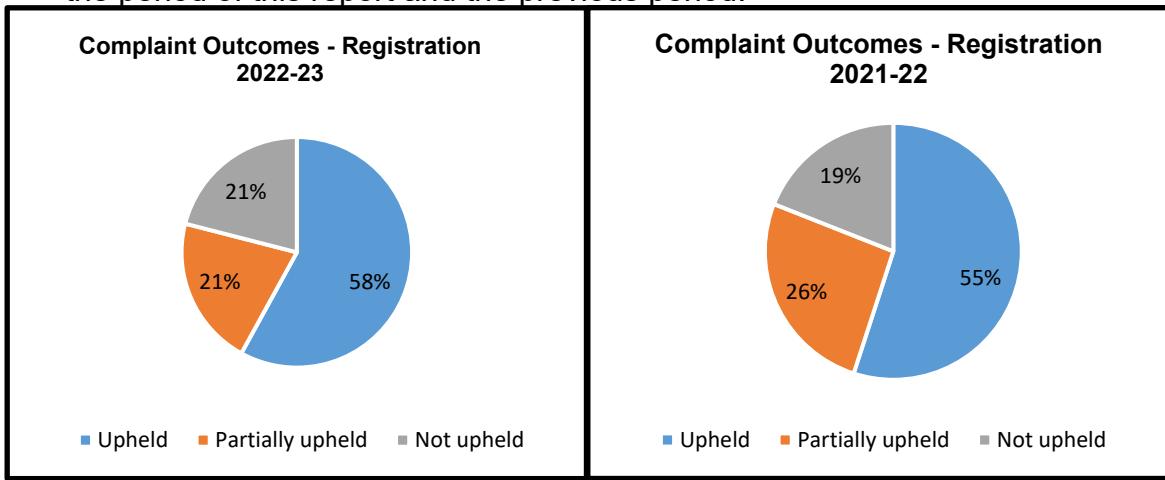
7 Complaint outcomes

- 7.1 Since October 2016 the HCPC has recorded whether complaints are upheld, not upheld, or partially upheld. This is a subjective assessment based on the validity of the main aspects of the complaint and any subsidiary issues. The Service and Complaints Manager makes this assessment to ensure consistency and neutrality. The Compliance team undertakes an annual audit of the consistency of the determinations made for assurance.
- 7.2 The graph below shows the distribution of outcomes across the organisation in the three categories during the period.



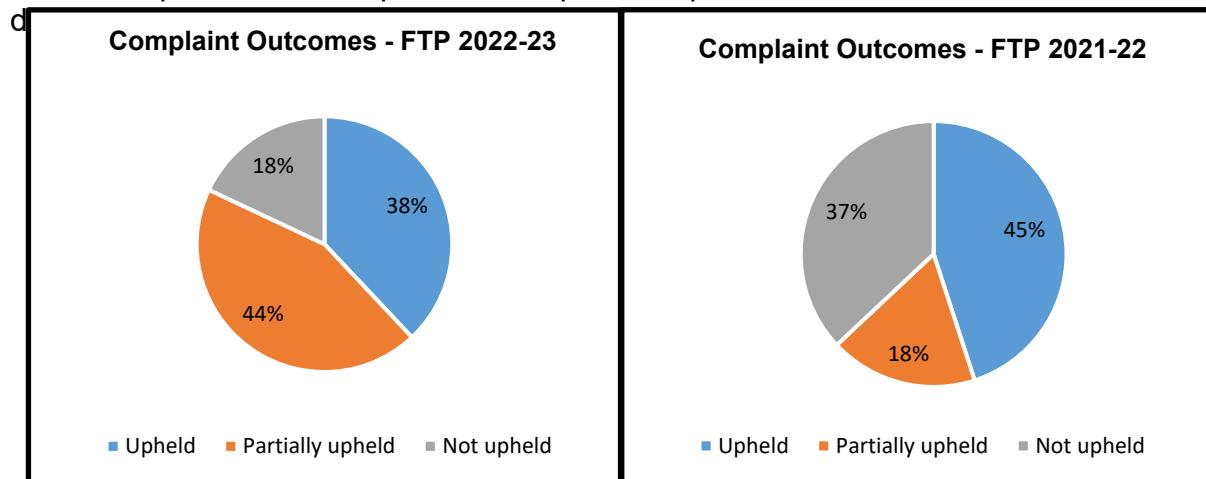
- 7.3 The majority of complaints (72%) during the review period were upheld or partially upheld. This is a slight decrease on the previous period (76%).
- 7.4 For complaints which are not upheld, the complainant is provided with details of any relevant actions, policies and procedures relevant to their complaint so they can understand why actions have or have not been taken.
- 7.5 We closed 6 complaints without sending a reply. This was because the complainants withdrew their complaint.

7.6 The graphs below show the distribution of outcomes for Registration during the period of this report and the previous period.



7.7 The position in the Registration department remained broadly the same.

7.8 The graphs below show the distribution of outcomes for FTP complaints the period of this report and the previous period.



7.9 There was a reduction in upheld complaints in FTP, although the proportion of partially upheld complaints significantly increased.

8 Positive feedback

- 8.1 The HCPC logs positive feedback alongside complaints to help ensure that good practice is noted alongside areas that could be improved. During the review period, we logged 86 pieces of positive feedback which is a reduction on the 105 received in the previous period, but higher than historic trends.
- 8.2 This feedback is recorded and is disseminated on a monthly basis across the organisation. The feedback includes letters and emails thanking employees for many different activities across the organisation.
- 8.3 The following are some examples of positive comments that we have received from stakeholders.

- Feedback from a registrant subject to an investigation for the case manager. They said 'I simply wanted to thank you for your kindness and professionalism in my case. This has been a very stressful emotional time for me and I would like to thank you for all you have done and how you have kept me informed.'
- Feedback from a registrant who had lapsed from the Register for a registration advisor. They said 'I would like to thank you and all the team at the HCPC for their support and indeed their swiftness in dealing with my situation. It is such a relief to be back on the Register again so quickly. Please pass on my wholehearted thanks to all at HCPC. You provided me with an excellent and efficient service.'
- Feedback from an Agency for the registration department regarding the recruitment process. They say 'This route seems to be very successful. A lot of the temps have moved on to perm contracts over the past year. They have come in only wanting to temp but you have made them fall in love with the place.'
- Feedback from a professional body about a presentation on Equality Diversity and Inclusion. 'We've had some really great feedback re your talk so thank you once again for speaking to our members. Your talk was very well received by our members (and) this has truly marked the start of a way in which we can inform members and work together to support equity, diversity and belonging throughout the profession. We've had some really great feedback re your talk so thank you once again for speaking to our members.'
- Feedback from an education provider for an administrator. They said 'I would like to thank you personally for the support you have afforded to me over the last 12 months in supporting the extension requests to programme(s), you were able to put me at ease when I thought the students would not be able to register, it was and still is very much appreciated.'
- Feedback from a registrant on Twitter about the online portal. They said 'Renewed one of my@The_HCPC registrations this evening for another 2 years, seamless process with the online portal.'
- Feedback from a person enquiring about biomedical science programmes. They said 'Thank you very much for your advice and really taking the time to listen to me and answer all my questions. Most of the phone conversations seem so rushed these days and as you know many public institutions do not have people available to pick up the phone.'
- Feedback from an employer of a staff member seeking readmission for a registration adviser. They said 'Thank you so much for spending time with me yesterday. You gave me the best explanations and advice and I can't tell you what a difference it made. So a very very big thank you for helping me

when I really needed help and support. Getting you on the phone was a bit of luck and a blessing.'

- Feedback from a former registrant seeking readmission for a registration manager. They said 'I am writing to sincerely thank you for taking the time to help my situation and doing so as rapidly. I am now registered and can start applying for jobs. Again thank you very much and have a lovely day.'
- Feedback from an applicant seeking advice about registration through social media. They said 'You made my day a special day by sending me confirmation email for my registration as an Occupational Therapist. Your support has made my peace of mind and I will be forever grateful. (the) whole team of @The_HCPC is very cooperative and hardworking.'
- Feedback from a witness at a hearing for a hearings officer. They said 'I just wanted to say thank you for looking after me on Thursday last week. It was a very difficult day but your support made it easier.'
- Feedback from the complainant in an FTP investigation for the case team manager. They said 'I'm extremely grateful for you taking the time to write to me, in addition providing an accurate account in response to my concerns in previous correspondence. I do also appreciate such efforts as this ongoing investigation has been timely.'
- Feedback from a public health authority regarding a request for registrant data. They said 'Thank you for sharing back the HCPC retention data with us. This is such a helpful by-product of the preceptorship work you have been undertaking, thank you so much for publishing it....We are really pleased with the progress on the preceptorship work thank you so much.'

8.4 Positive feedback is disseminated to employees and their managers when received. A personal thank you from ELT is sent to the person named in the positive feedback using our feedback and rewards system.

8.5 We have continued to increase awareness of positive feedback received and the fact that it is valued and recorded. Examples of positive feedback are mentioned in all employee meetings and posted on the internet every month.

9 Conclusion

9.1 We logged 650 complaints during the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. This is a reduction on the 708 logged during the previous period as the service issues in the Registration Department improved as the report period progressed.

9.2 The FTP and Registration Departments continue to receive the most feedback with 27% and 69% of the complaints received respectively, which is to be expected as these Departments have the most individual interactions with registrants and other stakeholders.

- 9.3 78% of complaint responses were sent within the expected response time of 15 working days.
- 9.4 We logged 86 pieces of positive feedback for individuals and teams across the organisation in this reporting period.