

Annual feedback and complaints report: 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

Executive Summary

The attached paper provides a summary of the feedback received between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024. 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 the Executive Leadership Team (ELT). Detailed monthly reports are sent to the relevant department heads, which always includes the heads of the Fitness to Practise (FTP) and Registration departments.

Previous consideration	None
Decision	The Committee is asked to discuss the report. No decision is required
Next steps	None
Strategic priority	Continuously improve and innovate Be visible, engaged and informed
Financial and resource implications	None as a result of this report.
EDI impact and Welsh Language Standards	Tracking trends in complaints enables us to monitor and identify if there are any EDI or Welsh Language issues which we need to address.
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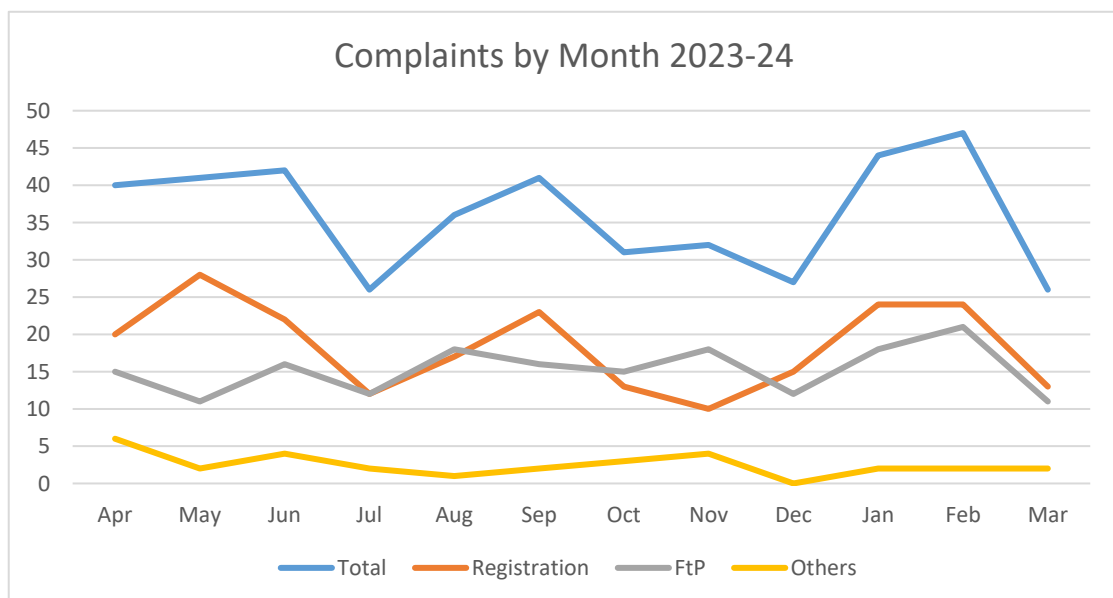
Annual review of feedback and complaints – 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

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 2023 and 31 March 2024.
- 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. The new Feedback and Complaints Manager took over the role of the previous Service and Complaints Manager fully on 1 April 2024, which is outside of this reporting period.
- 1.4. 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 2023 - 31 March 2024

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



- 2.2. 433 complaints were received during the reporting period, an average of 36 per month. This compares with 650 complaints at an average of 54 per month during 2022-23. There were, however, the highest monthly number of complaints ever received in April 2022 which largely accounts for the overall difference.

- 2.3. The vast majority of complaints received were about functions and activities carried out by the Registration and FTP departments, which received 51% and 42% of the complaints respectively. This compares to 69% and 27% of the complaints respectively in the previous period. These figures are similar every year as they are the most public facing departments, however the proportions this year are slightly closer together between the two main departments.
- 2.4. Spikes in complaints can be an indicator of issues that require addressing, such as with renewal challenges. Unlike the previous year, there were no significant spikes in complaints for 2023-24, which should be seen as a positive indicator of improved service.

3 Performance against service standard

- 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 the service standard.
- 3.2 We closed 312 complaints within our service level, which represents 72% of complaints to which we replied. This is less than the 77% replied to within service level during the previous reporting year and shows a downward trend over a three year period.
- 3.3 Registration responded to 88% of complaints within 15 working days, which was an 10% improvement from the previous year and good service levels occurred evenly throughout the period.
- 3.4 FTP responded to 55% of complaints withing 15 working days, which is a significant 20% drop in performance from the previous year. Service levels dipped between July 2023 and February 2024, with a low of 33% compliance in August 2023. This period was between the higher service levels of 75% and 85% compliance in June 2023 and March 2024 respectively.
- 3.5 The overall deterioration in performance was clearly impacted by the out of compliance FTP response times, which were largely due to the turnover of complaint responders in FTP and a reduced pool of people to allocate complaints.

4 Professional Standards Authority

- 4.1 In 2019-20 the PSA introduced a new standard (Standard 4) focusing 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 2023-24 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. The new Feedback and Complaints Manager continues to participate in these groups.

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:

- registration portal guidance was amended in relation to fee payments from business accounts (that require two signatures) to bring in line with the HCPC's contract with the bank;
- the email address for international enquiries provided in the registration email inbox auto response was corrected;
- a piece on reflective practise published on the website had the registrant referred to in both male and female genders so needed to be amended;
- the Communications team updated the customer service feedback page website to change the reference from standard of acceptance to threshold criteria;
- further training was given to call handlers where poor customer service was identified;
- an error with the registration system caused it to automatically send a confirmation of renewal letter to a former registrant - the root cause was identified, and an update implemented to prevent this happening again;
- a notice of hearing was sent to the wrong person which was a data breach and caused delays - the breach had been logged and staff training had been given to prevent a recurrence;
- a registrant's previous name appeared in the URL (web) relating to one of their hearings - this was corrected but due to caches would not be instant (notification of removal from Google had been received); and
- a system error which affected emails being sent from the Hearings team was identified and the issue resolved.

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 not kept regularly updated, are unable to contact the organisation by telephone or get responses to emails, or when their calls are not returned as promised.

- Complaints about the tone and content of correspondence were previously a consistent theme that appears to have been successfully addressed through last year's tone of voice review that was noted to keep under review in the previous annual report. There were no significant indications of tone of voice being an issue in 2023-24, which is a positive outcome.

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 considered for inclusion on the Operational Risk Register or Assurance work-planning.

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 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:** Complaints 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.

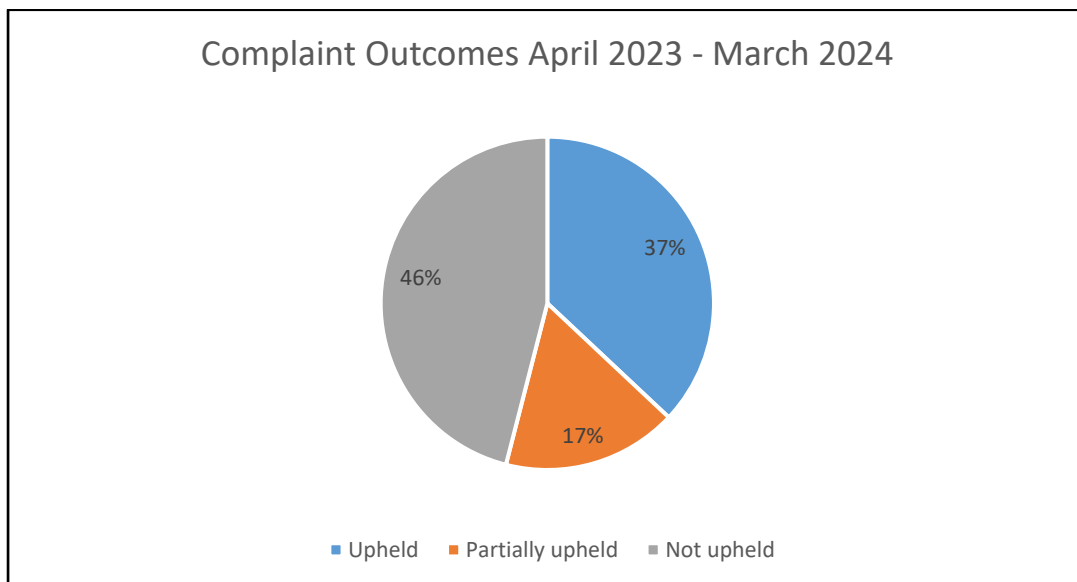
- **Registration renewal:** Registrants' concerns were around difficulties accessing the portal to complete online renewal. Registrants also complained that they did not receive email reminders of renewal and that we no longer sent renewal reminders by post.
- **UK applicants:** Applicants' main concerns 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.
- **International English Language Testing System (IELTS) tests:** Complaints 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.

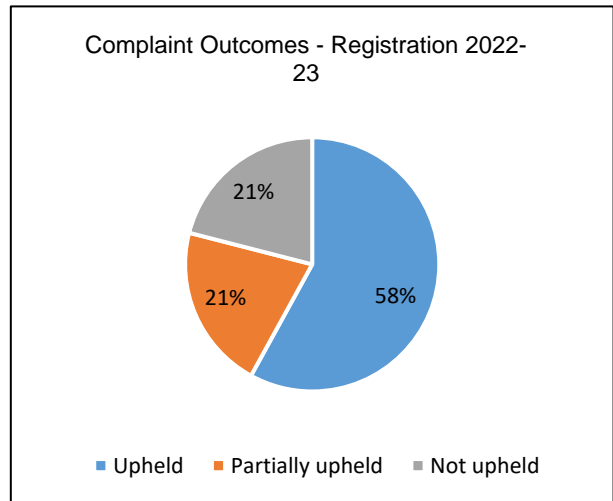
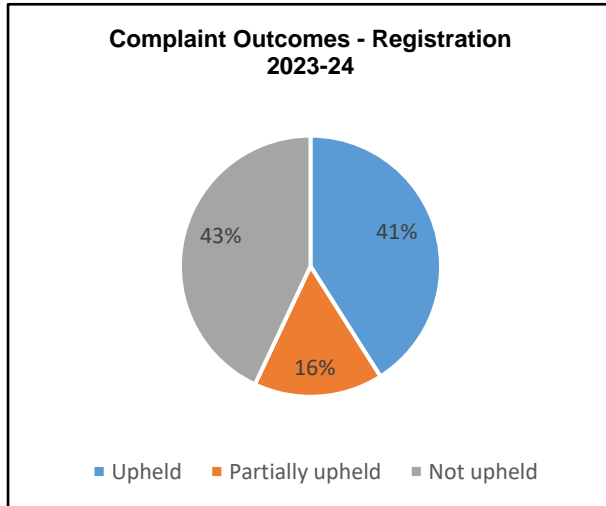
7.2 The graph below shows the distribution of outcomes across the organisation in the three categories during the period.



7.3 There was a levelling out of complaint outcomes this year, with only a slight majority of complaints (54%) during the review period determined to be either upheld or partially upheld. This is a significant decrease on the previous period (72%) and provides improved assurance on the processes that are in place.

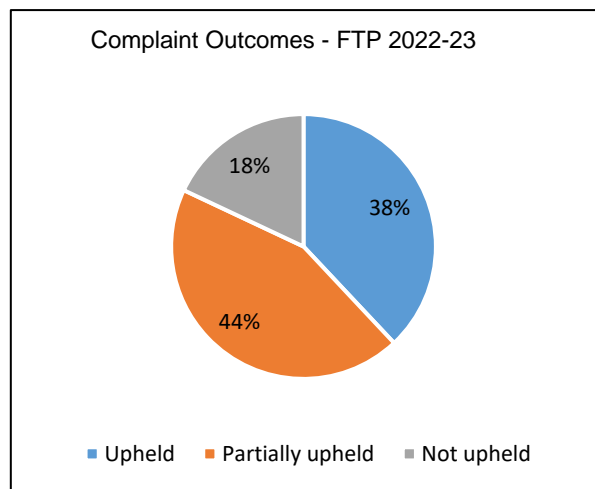
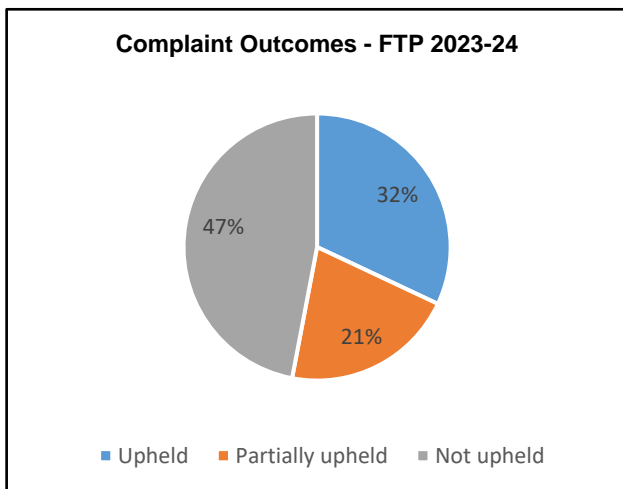
7.4 For complaints which are not upheld (46%), the complainant is provided with details of any relevant actions, policies and procedures relevant to their complaint so they can understand why actions have or have not been taken.

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



7.6 The Registration department has seen since the previous reporting period, a higher percentage share (doubling) of complaints that were not upheld and far fewer upheld or partially upheld complaints. Improvements made to processes such with renewals have been a contributing factor.

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



7.8 The most significant change in this reporting period for FTP compared to last year was the increase in proportion of complaints being not upheld and fewer partially upheld complaints. Many of the complaints that were not upheld were in relation to case closure decisions. Partially upheld complaints are often related to communication issues, and this proportionate reduction from 44% in 2022-23 to 21% in 2023-24 is an overall positive sign for this reporting period. It should be noted that there were some spikes in partially upheld complaints such as in October 2023 and the departments continue to monitor those incidents.

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 54 pieces of positive feedback which is a reduction on the 86 received in the previous period, but also a reflection on the overall complaint interactions compared to the previous period.
- 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 a some of examples of positive comments that we have received from stakeholders:

Recent registrant: 'This email is really just to say thank you very much to all of you out there who work to get these registrations completed. I know you probably deal with frustration and anger for much of the day – I just wanted to express deep appreciation and gratitude for your service.'

International applicant: 'I want to convey my heartfelt appreciation to your team for your unwavering efforts and support provided to international professionals like myself. I am thrilled to share that I received my registration precisely 32 days after applying, opening the door to my dream opportunity. I am sincerely grateful for the support and eagerly look forward to becoming part of your country's workforce in the near future.'

Royal College of Occupational Therapists related to a CPD Webinar: 'I just wanted to say a very big thank you to you both for your amazing input today. You are both excellent presenters with a wealth of knowledge and experience which has given our members such a valuable resource, helping them to feel supported and reassured about the upcoming audit. It has been so lovely to work with you both on this. Thank you.'

International applicant for the Registration department: 'I am writing to express my deepest gratitude to you and the entire team at the HCPC for your exceptional service and unwavering dedication. I cannot thank you enough for promptly processing my application and providing me with my registration number within such a short period of time. Your efficiency and professionalism have truly exceeded my expectations... I am honoured to be part of an organisation that places such a strong emphasis on excellence. The regular updates and informative emails that you have been sending have been invaluable in keeping me informed about the registration process and the various resources available to me... I am especially grateful for the HCPC's commitment to technological advancements, as exemplified by the online Register and the registrant portal. These platforms provide easy access to important information and enable us to manage our registration efficiently.... Once again thank you from the bottom of my heart for your outstanding service.'

Registrant seeking proof or registration for APHRA for the Registration department: 'Just want to say thank you to your team for such efficiency and good communication and for sending the information regarding my registration so readily. I really have been impressed with the HCPC in comparison with other bodies in other countries such as CORU and AHPRA. Would love for you to pass praise on to the team.'

Positive feedback continued:

Witness at a hearing: 'I so needed your email, you are very kind and thoughtful thank you. But thank you for keeping me informed yesterday, I realise how hard your job is, you must be an expert juggler.'

Witness at a hearing: 'I just wanted to say thank you for the support, guidance and explanation from yourself around the proceedings and format today. You certainly made me feel at ease and welcomed today – as did the panel as well. Please do pass this on to your team so they know the positive impact you have on witnesses attending hearings.'

Education provider for the Education department regarding a report for an institutional review: 'As an overall observation on the process, we would like to add that HCPC were very supportive through the process as we went through it for the first time, although it was an exceptionally large undertaking. Overall we are delighted with our outcome and really pleased we were able to demonstrate high quality provision across our institution, so thank you for your support.'

Registrant who was subject to an investigation: 'My heartfelt thanks for this; in terms of outcome, clarity and speed of communication. I am deeply grateful to you and your colleagues.'

Complainant in an FTP case. : 'I'm not sure if you have a compliments process, but I would like to thank [CM] who has been objective yet sympathetic and responded promptly to all correspondence.'

Registrant regarding the CPD process: 'I wanted to express my appreciation for you taking the time and helping me with uploading my CPD. It had taken me over a week and you were kind and patient in helping me. Because of your advice I have managed to upload it and am now less stressed. You were so reassuring and it's really nice to know that we have a brilliant team looking after us at HCPC. I will be grateful forever.'

International applicant: 'I want to convey my heartfelt appreciation to your team for your unwavering efforts and support provided to international professionals like myself. I am thrilled to share that I received my registration precisely 32 days after applying, opening the door to my dream opportunity. I am sincerely grateful for the support and eagerly look forward to becoming part of your country's workforce in the near future.'

Attendee at a presentation on CPD. They said 'I just wanted to say thank you so much for your time and input today. It was fabulously informative. My physio colleague has just said what a great job you did in presenting the task in hand simply, with lots of examples, and with a smiley disposition. You have successfully demystified the whole process for us all. My OT colleague here has shown me a spreadsheet he has put together just now to capture his activity and its impact, so change is happening all around me, thanks to you. 😊'

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists for information on renewal provided by the Policy team: 'Thank you for sending this through, good insight into how well the renewal period went for our profession this year. I would love to say that we had a hand in these figures but I think credit needs to go to you guys as the communication and support for members this year from HCPC was great and I have had really positive feedback anecdotally from our members.'

Positive feedback continued:

Positive feedback received on social media following a CPD webinar presentation for the CSP BAME network, co organized by CSP. They said, "Thank you (to the presenters) and @HCPC for such an excellent webinar on HCPC CPD AUDIT yesterday. I thank you both personally and on behalf of the CSP BAME Network."

This was followed up later in the month to say, "I am writing on behalf of the CSP BAME network to express our gratitude for your time and effort in conducting the CPD Webinar on 14/03/2024. The feedback from our members has been overwhelmingly positive and they have found the webinar to be extremely helpful. Your presentation style was clear and concise, and it really helped to demystify the CPD Audit process. Thank you for your excellent presentation and for sharing your expertise on this important topic. We appreciate your contributions to the network and look forward to working with you again in the future."

Registrant regarding the CPD process.: 'I wanted to express my appreciation for you taking the time and helping me with uploading my CPD. It had taken me over a week and you were kind and patient in helping me. Because of your advice I have managed to upload it and am now less stressed. You were so reassuring and it's really nice to know that we have a brilliant team looking after us at HCPC. I will be grateful forever.'

Positive feedback from an external medical stakeholder (Alliance Medical) for an engagement session delivered by Communications. They said, "The content you provided was fantastic and sparked some engaging discussions during our sessions. In fact, it was so impactful that I'm hoping to share it with our staff on the intranet. Regarding the overall feedback from our engagement days, I'm thrilled to report that HCPC consistently ranked #2 out of 7 topics covered, just behind our Managing Director/COO's business update which scored #1. So, technically it was #1 for any clinical updates/ external topics covered on the training days. The content was rated an impressive 4/5 stars on average for its relevance to the staff engagement days."

- 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 intranet every month.

9 Conclusion and Summary

- 9.1 We logged 433 complaints during the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. This is a reduction on the 650 logged during the previous period as improvements in the Registration Department had bedded in (mostly in relation to renewals).
- 9.2 The Registration and FTP and Departments continue to receive the most feedback with 51% and 42% complaints received respectively, which is to be expected as these Departments have the most individual interactions with registrants and other stakeholders.
- 9.3 72% of complaint responses were sent within the expected response time of 15 working days.
- 9.4 We logged 54 pieces of positive feedback for individuals and teams across the organisation in this reporting period.