CAA Annual Complaints Report 2025-2026

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Executive Summary

1. This report outlines the UK Civil Aviation Authority's (CAA's) complaint handling performance from April 2025 to March 2026, including complaint volumes, trends, performance against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and service improvements.

2. A total of 79 stage 1 complaints were received during this reporting period, representing a 29% reduction compared with 2024/25. This continues the downward trend in recent years, and ongoing service improvements are having a positive impact.

3. Poor service remained the most common complaint theme, primarily relating to delays, communication issues, and quality concerns. Complaints concerning staff behaviour fell significantly compared with the previous year.

4. The Shared Service Centre (SSC)received the highest number of complaints, accounting for 17 cases (21.5% of the total). Although this represents a 50% reduction from the previous year, the volume is proportionate to the size of the customer base served by the SSC, including the processing of 12,307 licence applications and 18,555 aircraft registrations.

5. Escalations increased, with 29 cases progressing to stage 2 (37%), more than double the number recorded in 2024/25 (see Appendix C for details of the complaints process). Dissatisfaction with outcomes and response quality were the main drivers. Referrals to the Independent Complaint Assessor (ICA) rose from five to 10 cases, while no complaints were referred to the Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) for the second consecutive year.

6. Performance against timeliness targets remained strong overall. The CAA achieved a 99% acknowledgement rate for stage 1 complaints and 100% for stage 2 reviews, exceeding the relevant targets. Response performance also improved, with 95% of stage 1 complaints and 93% of stage 2 reviews responded to within target timescales. However, performance in obtaining draft responses from business areas within agreed timescales remained below tolerance levels, highlighting ongoing challenges in meeting internal deadlines.

7. In terms of outcomes, 46% of stage 1 complaints and 33% of stage 2 reviews were upheld, either in full or in part. While these percentages should be interpreted cautiously given to the lower overall complaint volumes, they continue to provide valuable insight into areas requiring further service improvements.

8. The CAA continue to foster a strong learning culture, using complaints as an important source of insight. During of the year, 49 lessons were identified and 76 service improvements implemented across areas including communications, processes, systems and customer guidance. The principal root causes remained consistent, with communication, process, and quality control continuing to driver customer dissatisfaction.

Key Headlines 2025-26

9. Complaint performance against key performance indicators (KPIs): 2025/26 compared with 2024/25. Further detail is provided throughout this report.

79 complaints received
Down from 111 in 2024/25, a 29% reduction

99% acknowledgement rate
Achieved at stage 1, consistent with 2024/25

95% response rate
Response performance imporved from 93% in 2024/25, *(stage 1)*

46% (39) upheld
Slighly lower - 44% (47) in 2024/25 (*stage 1)*

29 Stage 2 escalations (37%)
More than double 14 escalations (22%) in 2024/25

100% acknowledgement rate
Increase from 94% in 2024/25 *(stage 2)*

93% response rate
Slight increase from 92% in 2024/25 *(stage 2)*

33% (10) Upheld
Slightly lower then 38% in 2024/25 *(stage 2)*

10 ICA Reviews requested
Higer than 2024/25, with requests increasing from 5 to 10

0 PHSO case
No referrals to the PHSO for the second consecutive year

£

£7,690.50 ICA costs
Increased from £1,756.90 in 2024/25

Chapter 1
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

1.1 The following section provides an overview of our performance against the CAA complaint KPIs.

KPI 1: Total number of Stage 1 complaints received

Description	Number
Total number of Stage 1 complaints received	79

KPI 2: Number of complaints escalated at each stage

1.2 When a complainant is dissatisfied with the handling of their complaint, they have the option to escalate it to a stage 2 review. This is a higher-level internal review, normally conducted and signed off senior management.

1.3 Where a complainant remains dissatisfied following a stage 2 review, they may request a referral to the Independent Complaint Assessor (ICA) for further review. Should they remain dissatisfied after the ICA review, the final stage of escalation is to seek a review by the Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO), via their MP.

Description	Number
Number of stage 2 requests received	29
Number of ICA referral requests received	10
Number of PHSO cases	0

KPI 3: Percentage of complaints acknowledged within 5 working days at each stage

Description	Percentage
Percentage of stage 1 complaints acknowledged within 5 working days (Target: 95%, Tolerance: 90%)	99%
Percentage of stage 2 complaints acknowledged within 5 working days (Target: 95%, Tolerance: 90%)	100%

KPI 4: Percentage of draft responses received from business areas within 15 working days at each stage

Description	Percentage
Percentage of stage 1 draft responses received from business areas within 15 working days (Target: 95%, Tolerance: 90%)	83%
Percentage of stage 2 draft responses received from business areas within 15 working days (Target: 95%, Tolerance: 90%)	90%

KPI 5: Average time (in working days) for the business areas to provide a draft response at each stage

Description	Working Days
Average time (working days) taken by business areas to provide a stage 1 draft response	13
Average time (working days) taken by the business area to provide a stage 2 draft response	13

KPI 6: Percentage of complaints responded to within 20 working days at each stage

Description	Percentage
Percentage of stage 1 complaints responded to within 20 working days (Target: 95%, Tolerance: 90%)	95%
Percentage of stage 2 complaints responded to within 20 working days (Target: 95%, Tolerance: 90%)	93%

KPI 7: Average time (in working days) to provide a full response to a complaint at each stage.

Description	Working Days
Average time (working days) taken to provide a full response to Stage 1 complaints	15
Average time (working days) taken to provide a full response to Stage 2 complaints	18

KPI 8: Number and percentage of complaints where an extension has been authorised

1.4 There are occasions where an extension to the response timescale is required due to the complexity or nature of the complaint.

Description	Number	Percentage
Number and percentage of Stage 1 complaints with an authorised extension	3	3.6%
Number and percentage of Stage 2 complaints with an authorised extension	8	26.7%

1.5 Of the three stage 1 complaints where an authorised extension was applied, all were due to the complexity of the issues and the need for cross-departmental input.

1.6 Of the eight stage 2 complaints where an authorised extension was applied, most were due to the complexity of the issues, with a small number also due to internal resource constraints.

KPI 9: Outcome of complaints at each stage (upheld / not upheld / partially upheld)

1.7 Of the 84 stage 1 complaints closed, 39 (46%) were upheld (in full or in part). This is fewer than in 2024/25, where 47 complaints were upheld, however, this represents a slight increase in the proportion upheld (46% compared to 44%). Given the lower volumes of complaints, percentage changes should be interpreted with caution.

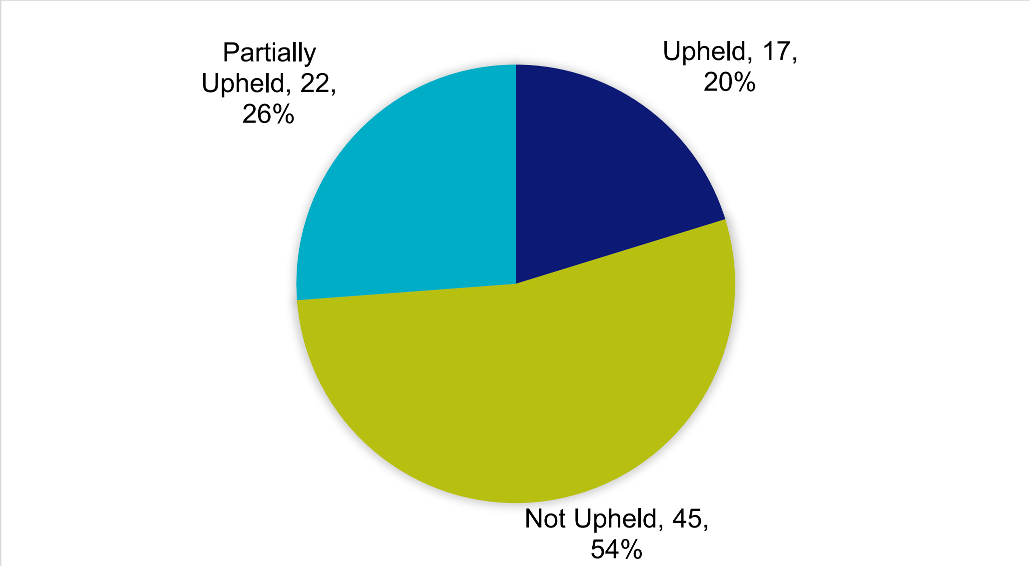

Figure 1: Stage 1 complaint outcomes (numbers & percentage)

1.8 Of the 30 stage 2 complaints closed, 10 (33%) were upheld (in full or in part). This compares to 5 (38%) in 2024/25. While the proportion upheld has decreased by 5 percentage points, the overall number of stage 2 reviews has increased, which should be taken into account when comparing performance.

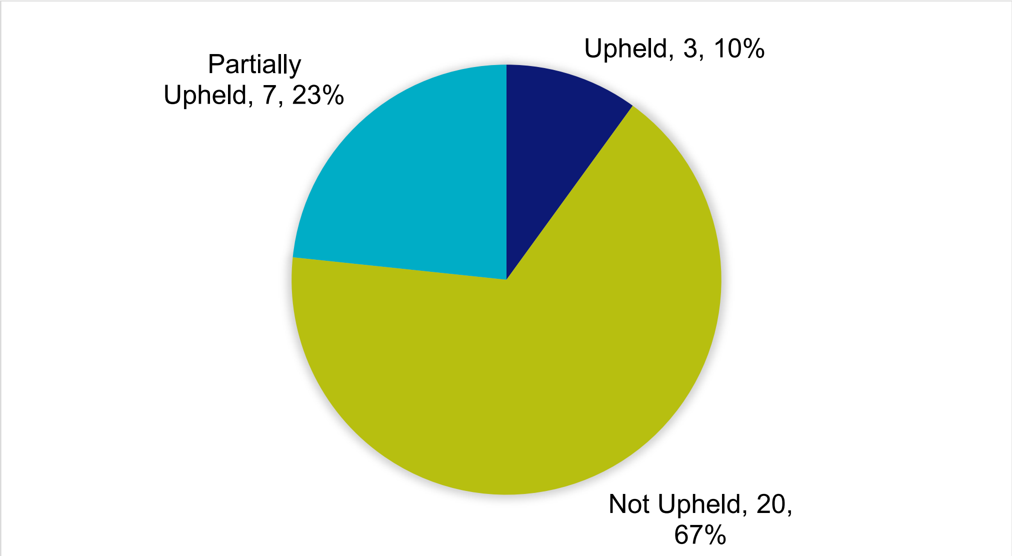

Figure 2: Stage 2 complaint outcomes (numbers & percentage)

KPI 10: Percentage of ICA referral requests acknowledged within 15 working days

Description	Percentage
Percentage of ICA referral requests acknowledged within 15 working days (Target: 95%, Tolerance: 90%)	100%

KPI 11: Percentage of ICA referral requests referred to the ICA within 15 working days

Description	Percentage
Percentage of ICA referral requests acknowledged within 15 working days (Target: 95%, Tolerance: 90%)	100%

KPI 12: Average time (working days) for a complaint to be referred to the ICA

Description	Working Days
Average time (in working days) for a complaint to be referred to the ICA (Target: 15 working days)	3

Chapter 2

Complaint Performance & Themes Summary

2.1 This section provides detailed insight into complaints received, service level agreement (SLA) performance, key themes, and outcomes.

Complaints received

A total of 79 stage 1 complaints were received between April 2025 and March 2026, a 29% decrease from 111 in 2024/25.

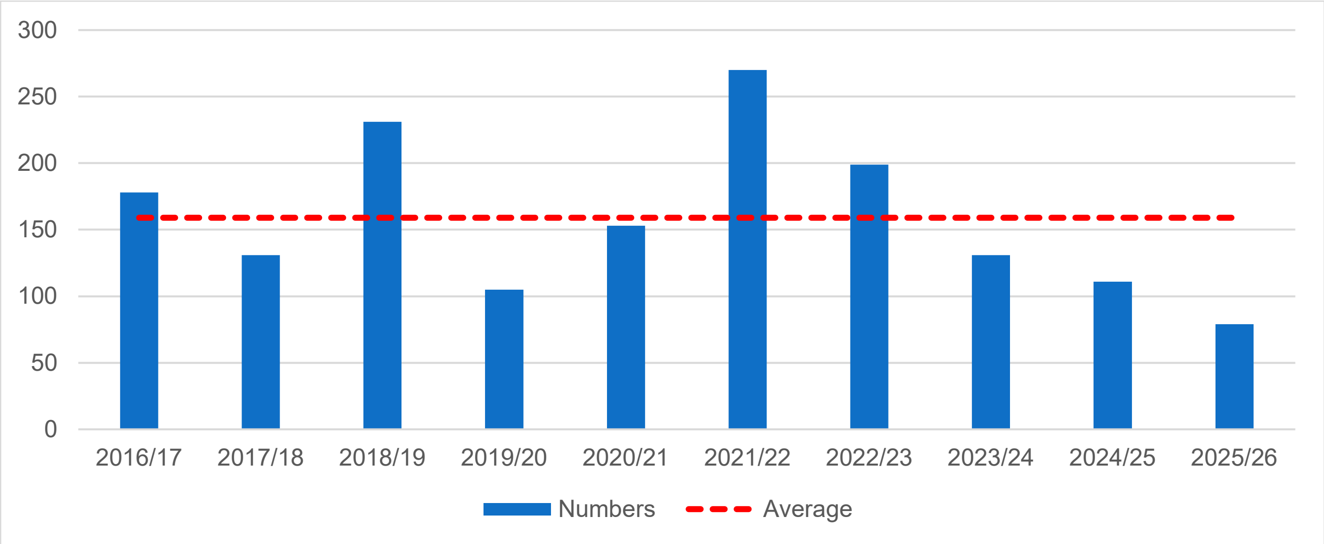

Figure 3: Number of stage 1 complaints received by financial year, the red dotted line reflects the average, which is 159, although worth noting that the COVID years were probably not typical.

2.2 For the year 2025/26, the number of complaints received remained broadly consistent across each quarter, with a peak in June when 14 complaints were recorded. These complaints covered a range of issues, including application processing delays, failure to respond to enquiries, and quality or systemic-related concerns.

2.3 Further peaks occurred in August 2025 (9) and March 2026 (8). Most complaints were categorised as ‘Poor service’ and ‘Staff Behaviour’, with key themes including application processing delays, quality or systemic concerns, and staff competence, attitude and responsiveness.

2.4 Compared to 2024/254, where peaks were recorded in the first three months of 2025, as well as in June and September, similar themes were identified. However, complaints relating to staff behaviour have decreased significantly, from 13 in 2024/25 to 5 2025/26.

Escalations

2.5 A total of 29 Stage 1 complaints were escalated to stage 2 this reporting year, compared to 14 in 2024/25: representing a 107% increase. The primary reasons for escalation were dissatisfaction with the outcome, key points not being addressed, and perception of an inadequate / unsatisfactory response. One complaint also cited a lack of quality and professionalism in the stage 1 response.

2.6 The overall escalation rate, based on the proportion of stage 1 complaints escalated to stage 2 in 2025/26, was 37%. This represents an increase of 24 percentage points compared to 2024/25. This rise reflects a higher number of stage 2 escalation requests during the reporting period, rather than a direct increase in overall complaint volumes. Work is underway to review and strengthen our processes to help reduce escalations going forward.

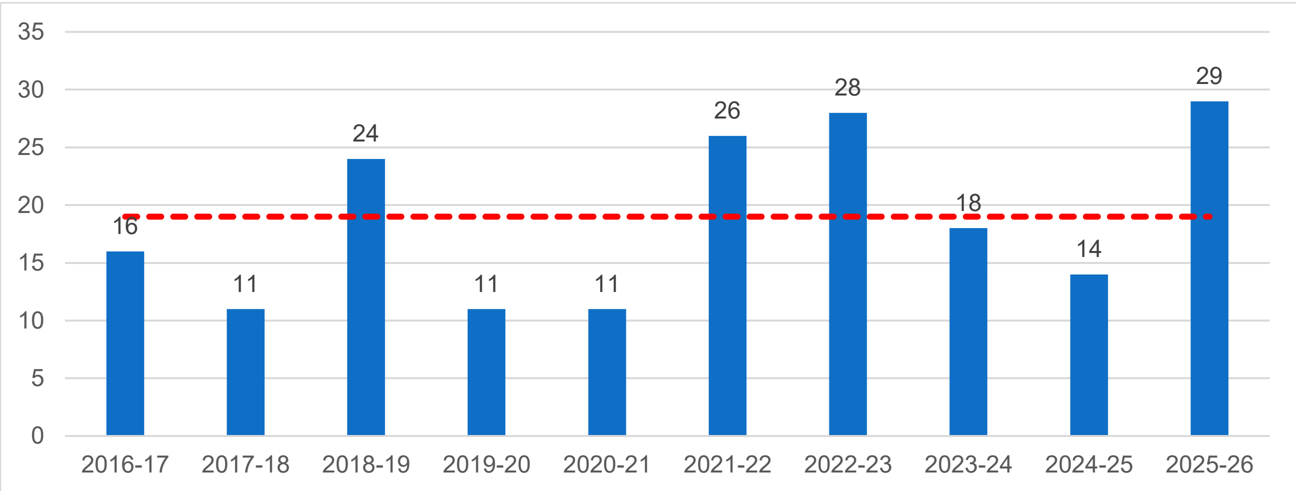

Figure 4: Number of stage 2 escalation requests by financial year, with the red dotted line reflecting the average which is 19.

2.7 In 2025/26, stage 2 reviews showed clear peaks in July (7) & September (4) 2025 with most other months ranging between 1 and 3 cases, and none recorded in June or December 2025. The majority were categorised as ‘Poor service’, primarily linked to application processing delays, quality or systemic concerns, and communication failures. A similar pattern was observed in 2024/25, with activity concentrated in April and October 2024, and March 2025, and ‘Poor service’, remaining the dominant driver.

2.8 In 2025/26, total of 10 ICA referral requests was received, equating to a 100% increase compared to 2024/25. Whilst all related to various categories, a majority cited a dissatisfaction with the outcome of their stage 2 review, as reasons for referral to the ICA.

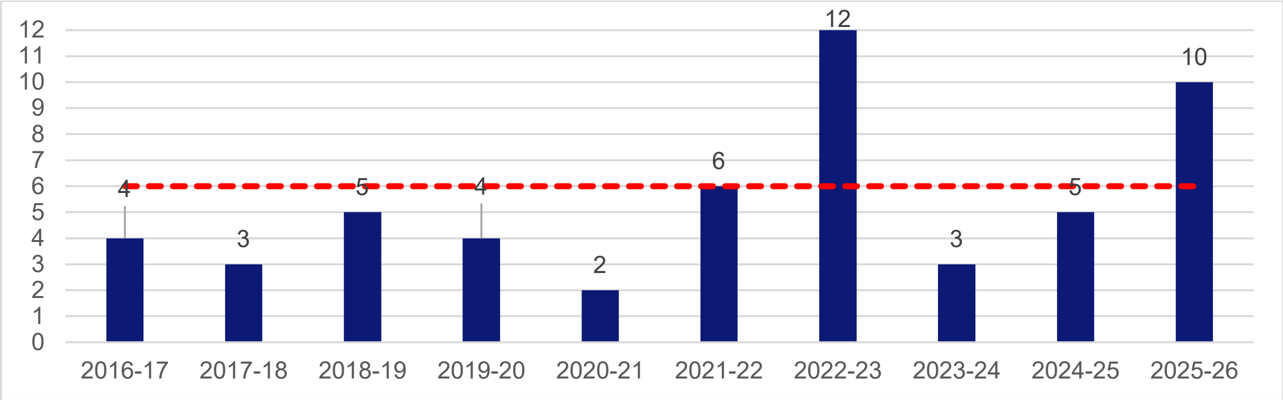

Figure 5: Number of ICA referral requests by financial years, with the red dotted line reflecting the average which is 6

2.9 No cases were received from the PHSO between April 2025 and March 2026, consistent with the position in 2024/25. The PHSO continue to record any preliminary reviews of complaint files as investigations in its annual figures, rather than limiting this to cases that proceed to formal investigated with the CAA.

2.10 When comparing the number of stage 1 complaints received with ICA referrals, 13% were escalated to the ICA, representing an 8-percentage point increase on the previous year. In comparison, 34% of stage 2 complaints escalated to the ICA, a decrease of 2 percentage points from last year. However, this should be considered in the context of an overall reduction in complaint volumes.

Complaint Themes and Trends

2.11 Complaints are assessed and categorised by their primary focus and the relevant CAA business area, allowing for systematic analysis of complaint types and the identification of emerging trends.

Stage 1 complaints

2.12 The most frequent complaint categories between April 2025 and March 2026 were Poor service, Over regulation / gold plating, and Lack of CAA action.

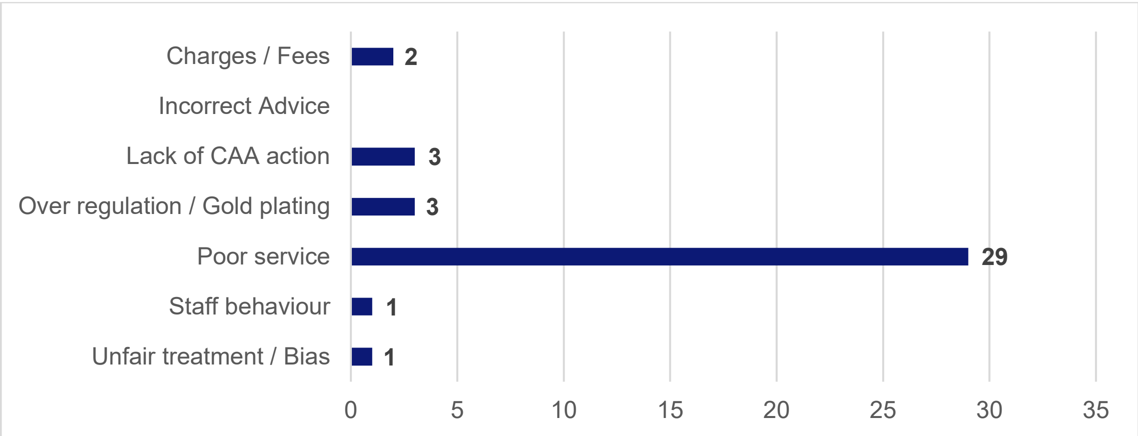

Figure 6: Stage 1 complaints received by category

2.13 Analysis of the top 3 categories of received stage 1 complaints has identified the following types of complaints:

Category	Type	Number of complaints
Poor Service	Application processing delays	10
	Failure to respond to enquiries	3
	Other (Quality & systemic issues)	16
Over Regulation / Gold Plating	Application processing delays	1
	Other (Quality & systemic issues)	1
	Lack of Information	1
Lack of CAA action	Failure to respond to enquiries	1
	Lack of information	1
	Poor execution of policy / regulation	1

Table 1: Top three stage 1 complaint themes by type

2.14 After a significant increase in staff behaviour complaints last year, a substantive decline has been observed this year, potentially indicating that initiatives to improve customer experience and service standards are having a positive effect.

2.15 While application processing delays have traditionally been the primary source of complaints, quality and wider service-related issues emerged as the leading concern in 2025/26. Application processing complaints increased marginally compared to last year, reinforcing the need to maintain clear communication and manage customer expectations throughout the application journey.

2.16 Complaints categorised as 'Other' increased compared to 2024/25 and highlighted a range of cross cutting service issues. They most common themes related to timeliness, particularly in PACT & ATOL case handling, alongside concerns about consistency and decision making. Complaints also identified process and system-related inefficiencies, including issues with application handling, digital systems (such as CELLMA and online forms), and end-to-end workflow management.

2.17 The 79 new complaints received between April 2025 and March 2026 related to the following CAA business areas:

Business Area	Number Received	Percentage
Communications, Strategy & Policy (CSP)	1	1.3%

Business Area	Number Received	Percentage
Communications, Strategy & Policy – Communications & Engagement Team (CSP-C&ET)	1	1.3%
Communications, Strategy & Policy – External Information Delivery (CSP-EID)	1	1.3%
Consumers & Markets Group (CMG)	7	8.9%
Professional Services Group – Shared Service Centre (PSG-SSC)	17	21.5%
Professional Services Group – Passenger Advise and Complaints Team (PSG-PACT)	12	15.2%
Safety & Airspace Regulation Group – Airspace (SARG-Airspace	7	8.9%
Safety & Airspace Regulation Group – Aerodromes & Air Traffic Management (SARG–AERO/ATC)	1	1.3%
Safety & Airspace Regulation Group – Airworthiness (SARG–AW)	4	5.1%
Safety & Airspace Regulation Group – Flight Operations (SARG–FO)	5	6.3%
Safety & Airspace Regulation Group – General Aviation (SARG–GA)	2	2.5%
Safety & Airspace Regulation Group – Medical (SARG–MED)	3	3.8%
Safety & Airspace Regulation Group – Remotely Piloted Aircraft System Unit (SARG – RPAS)	4	5.1%
CES–Finance & PSG–SSC	1	1.3%
CES–Finance & SARG–FO	1	1.3%

Business Area	Number Received	Percentage
Consumer & Markets Group – Enforcement (CMG-Enf.) & CSP-EID	1	1.3%
CSP–EID & PSG–PACT)	1	1.3%
Office of General Counsel – Investigation Enforcement Team (OGC-IET) & SARG–GA	1	1.3%
PSG-SSC–Contact Centre (CC), SARG–Airspace & RPAS	1	1.3%
PSG-SSC & SARG-AW	3	3.8%
PSG-SSC & SARG–GA	2	2.5%
PSG-SSC & SARG-MED	2	2.5%
SARG–AW & GA	1	1.3%

Table 2: Stage 1 complaints received by CAA Business Area.

2.18 The table above shows that PSG-SSC received the highest volume of complaints over the year, reflecting the scale of its daily transactional activity. However, volumes have reduced significantly over the past five year, having previously exceeded 100 complaints annually, demonstrating that learning from complaints is driving improvements in service delivery.

2.19 SSC–PACT complaint volumes have increased slightly this year, largely due to ongoing service performance issues, including case delays, limited updates, and inconsistent handling The Increase is likely driven by higher demand as travel recovers post-COVID-19, alongside increased awareness of passenger rights resulting from targeted campaigns.

2.20 The other high figures relate to SARG-Airspace & CMG. While volumes for SARG-Airspace are consistent with last year, with a similar profile of issues, CMG volumes have increased slightly, with all complaints relating to delays in ATOL claim processing. This increase is largely driven by the performance of the claims handling agency, as well as dependency on the number of ATOL failures, resulting in increased demand.

2.21 The table below provides a breakdown of PSG-SSC complaints, offering further insight into how they are distributed across the different SSC teams.

SSC Team	Number Received	Percentage
Aeromedical Support (SSC-MED)	1	5.9%
Aircraft Certification (SSC–AC)	1	5.9%
Aircraft Registration (SSC–AR)	1	5.9%
Flight Crew Licensing (SSC–FCL)	4	23.5%
Licensing Assessment (SSC–LA)	7	41.2%
Licensing Support (SSC–LS)	3	17.6%

Table 3: Breakdown of complaints received by SSC Team.

2.22 SSC-LA accounts for the highest complaint volumes, with key themes centred around delays, response times, and unclear or insufficient communication on exams and licencing processes, suggesting opportunities to improve timeliness and transparency.

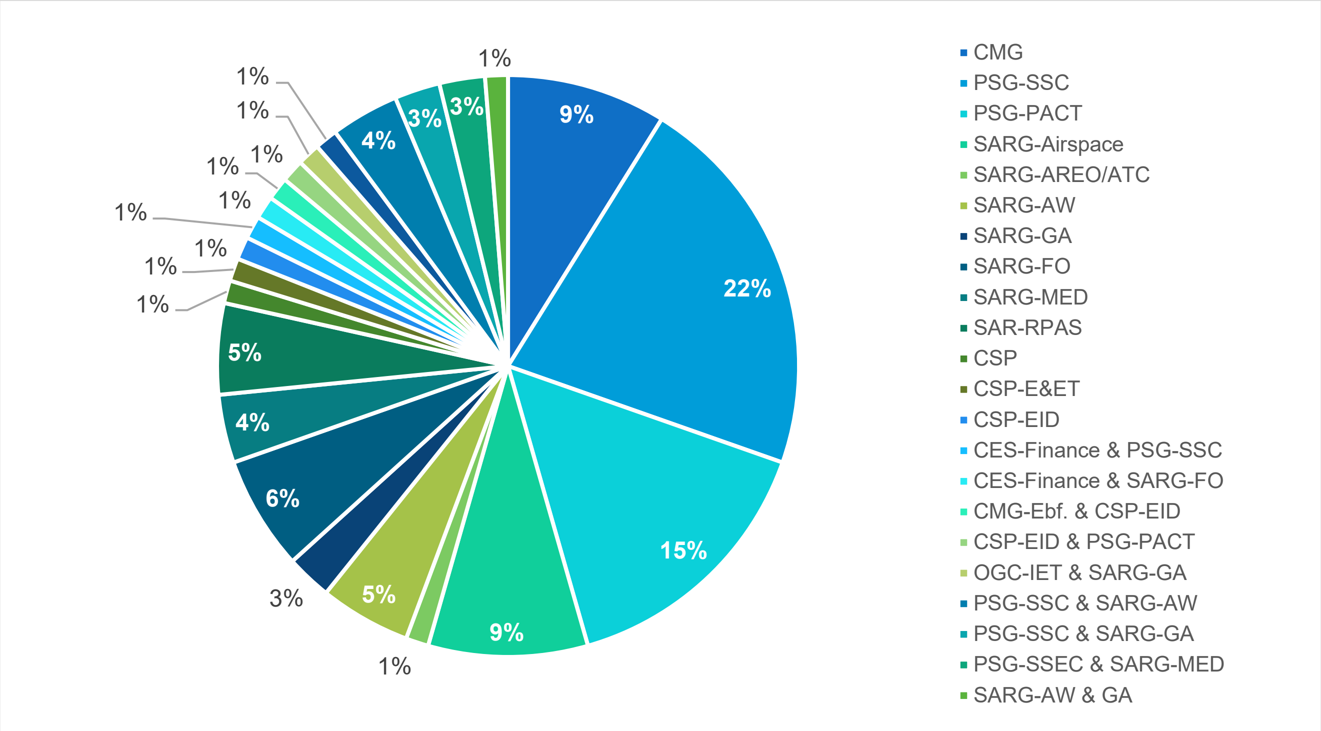

Figure 7: Complaints received by Business Area by percentage (stage 1), as shown in table 2.

Stage 2 complaints

2.23 The same list of complaint categories is used when a stage 2 review is logged; however, the selected category may differ from stage 1 depending on the reason for escalation.

2.24 Between April 2025 and March 2026, the top 3 categories on stage 2 escalations were Poor service, Over regulation / gold plating and Lack of CAA action, mirroring those identified at stage 1.

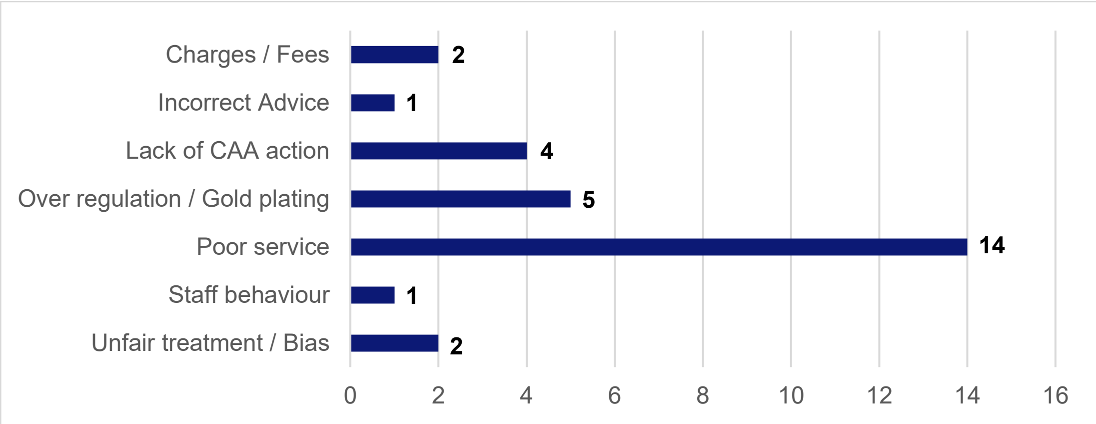

Figure 8: Stage 2 complaints by category

2.25 A total of 29 stage 2 complaints were received between April 2025 and March 2026, relating to the following CAA business areas:

Business Area	Number Received	Percentage
PSG-SSC	6	20.7%
PSG-PACT	3	10.3%
SARG-Airspace	3	10.3%
SARG–AERO/ATC	1	3.4%
SARG-GA	4	13.8%
SARG-FO	1	3.4%
SARG-MED	2	6.9%
SARG-RPAS	2	6.9%
CSP	1	3.4%

Business Area	Number Received	Percentage
CES-Finance & SARG-FO	1	3.4%
CMG-Enf. & CSP-EID	1	3.4%
CMG-Enf., CSP-EID, OGC & PSG-PACT	1	3.4%
CMG-Enf., OGC & PSG-PACT	1	3.4%
OGC & SARG-FO	1	3.4%
PSG-SSC & SARG-AW	1	3.4%

Table 4: Stage 2 complaints received by CAA Business Area.

2.26 The table above shows that PSG-SSC received the highest number of stage 2 complaints, consistent with stage 1, with most citing dissatisfaction with the stage 1 response, particularly where key issues were not addressed or explanations were insufficient.

2.27 The next highest number of stage 2 complaints were attributed to SARG-GA, with an equal split between dissatisfaction with the outcome and concerns that key points were not addressed at stage 1.

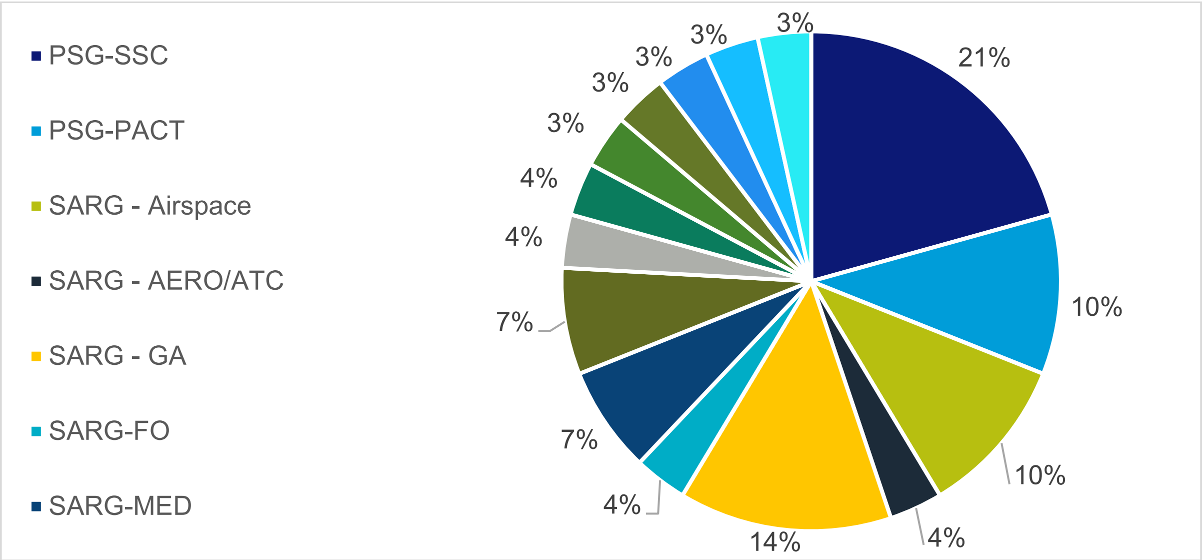

Figure 9: Stage 2 complaints received by Business Area by percentage

ICA & PHSO Referrals

2.28 The same list of complaint categories is used when logging an ICA referral; however, the selected category may differ from stage 1 or stage 2 depending on the reason for escalation.

2.29 Between April 2025 and March 2026, poor service and lack of CAA action were the main reason for referrals, consistent with all other stages.

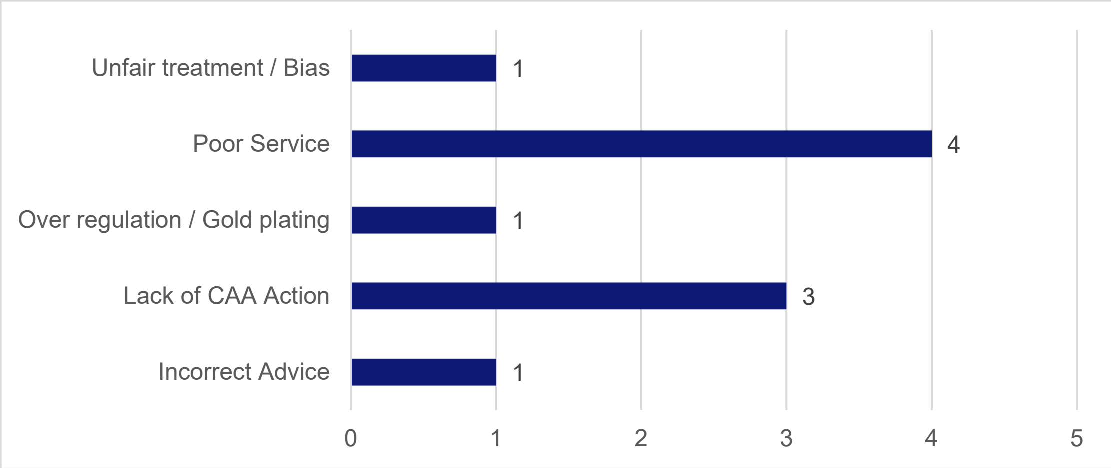

Figure 10: ICA Referrals received by category.

2.30 There were again no PHSO cases recorded between April 2025 and March 2026.

2.31 The 10 ICA referrals received were related to the following CAA business areas:

Business Area	Number Received	Percentage
PSG-SSC	1	10%
PSG-PACT	2	20%
SARG-AW	1	10%
SARG-GA	1	10%
SARG-RPAS	1	10%
CMG-Enf. & CSP-EID	1	10%
CMG-Enf., CSP-EID, OGC & PSG-PACT	1	10%
CSP-EID & PSG-Airprox	1	10%
OGC & SARG-RPAS	1	10%

Table 5: ICA referrals by CAA Business Area.

2.32 There are no dominant business areas; while PACT accounts for 3 of the 10 cases and RPAS for 2, some cases involved cross-departmental input, meaning they cannot be attributed solely to one team.

Complaint Response & Outcomes

2.33 Once a complaint is allocated to the relevant business area, a draft response must be provided to the complaints team within15 working days, and all complaints must be responded to within 20 working days of receipt.

2.34 Where a business area is unable to meet the draft response deadline, an extension may be requested from the Complaints team. Extensions are typically granted only where additional time is required to complete a thorough investigation, rather than due to staff absence or availability.

Stage 1 draft response performance

2.35 A total of 82 draft stage 1 responses were due between April 2025 and March 2026. Of these, 85% were received from business areas within the agreed timescale. This remains below the 90% tolerance threshold and is unchanged from the previous year, indicating no improvement in performance over the period

2.36 The sustained underperformance against the tolerance threshold indicates that existing measures have not been sufficient to improve timeliness in providing draft responses. Delays at this stage of the process can affect the efficiency of complaint handling and increase the risk of complaints exceeding target response times. Further work is therefore required to identify and address the underlying causes of delays within business areas.

2.37 A total of 12 stage 1 complaints did not meet the 15 working days draft response deadline. of these, only three had an authorised extension following a formal request from the business area.

2.38 Delays were primarily associated with more complex complaints, which often required input from multiple business areas before a response could be finalised. Some complaints were also characterised by lengthy and highly detailed correspondence, including submissions that appeared to have been generated or assisted by AI tools, increasing the time required for review and response.

Stage 2 draft response performance

2.39 A total of 30 draft stage 2 complaint responses were due between April 2025 – March 2026. Of these, 83% were received from business areas within the agreed timescale. This performance falls below the 90% tolerance threshold and represents a 9% decline compared to the previous year.

2.40 The downward trend indicates a deterioration in timeliness at stage 2, which may reflect increasing complexity in escalated complaints and greater demand on business area resources.

2.41 A total of five stage 2 complaint did not meet the 15 working day draft response deadline. Formal extensions were requested in eight cases, reflecting the complexity of the complaints and the additional time required to respond.

Stage 1 response performance

2.42 A total of 84 stage 1 complaints were responded to between April 2025 and March 2026. Overall, 95% of those responses were issued to complainants within the agreed timescale, meeting the target. This represents an improvement from 93% in 2024-25, reflecting a 2% increase in performance year on year.

Please note: the number of complaints closed during the period may differ from the number received, due to the overlap with cases carried forward from previous months.

Stage 2 response performance

2.43 A total of 30 stage 2 complaints were responded to between April 2025 – March 2026. Overall, 93% of responses were issued to complainants within the agreed timescale, which is just below the 95% target. This represents a marginal improvement from 92% in 2024-25, indicating a slight upward trend in performance, although further progress is required to consistently meet the expected standard.

2.44 Two stage 2 complaint did not meet the agreed response deadline of 20 working days. Extensions were requested in 11 cases, reflecting the complexity of the issues and the need for additional time to respond.

Remedial Actions

2.45 Most complaints are resolved through an apology and acknowledgement of lessons learned. Where necessary, additional actions may include expediting or re-assessing applications or clarifying complex decisions. Some cases require extensive investigation, including third-party involvement, and may remain unresolved despite best efforts.

2.46 Refunds or waivered charges may be appropriate, with compensation offered where financial loss is demonstrated, in line with guidelines. During this period £244.25 was refunded for stage 1 complaints, with no other waivers or compensation payments.

2.47 The same principles apply to stage 2 complaints. During this period £30.00 was refunded, with no other waivers or compensation payments.

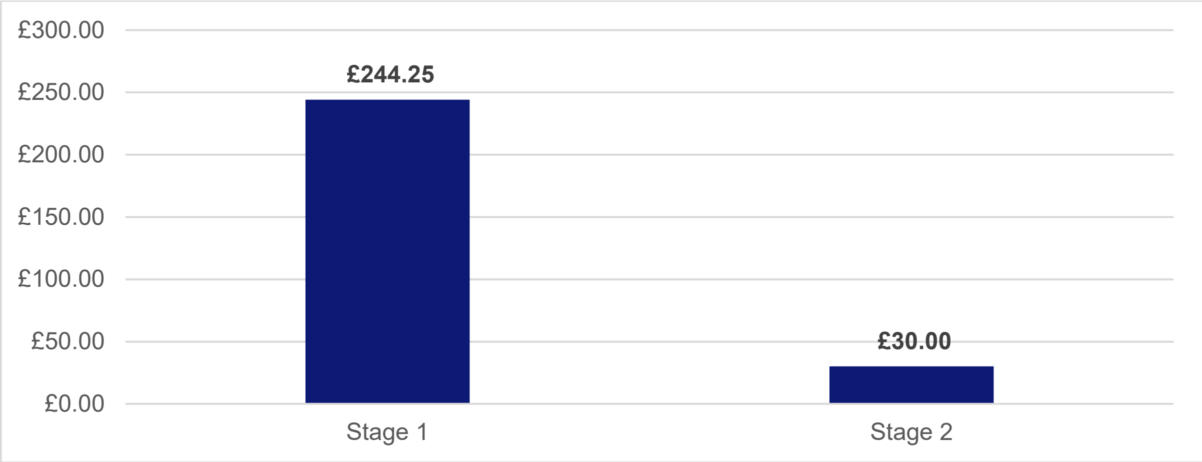

Figure 11: Refunds made against stage 1 & stage 2 complaints.

Root causes

2.48 Root cause analysis is a critical component of complaint handling, enabling a clearer understanding of why issues arise. Complaint handlers are encouraged to identify the root cause wherever possible.

2.49 Analysis of stage 1 complaints indicate that the key root causes are communication, process, quality control, operational and capacity.

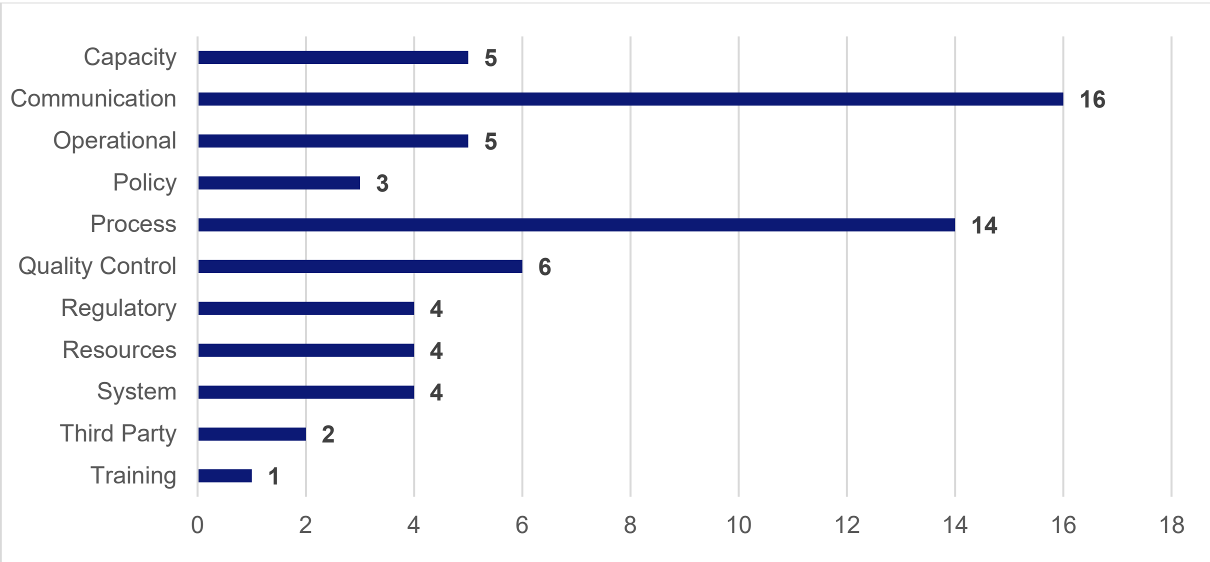

Figure 12: Root causes identify (upheld / partially upheld stage 1 complaints).

Please note that individual complaints may have multiple root cause, meaning the total number of root causes identified may exceed the number of upheld complaints.

2.50 The same root cause principles apply to stage 2 complaints. Analysis indicates that the key root causes of stage 2 reviews are communication, process, and quality control, consistent with the key themes in stage 1 complaints.

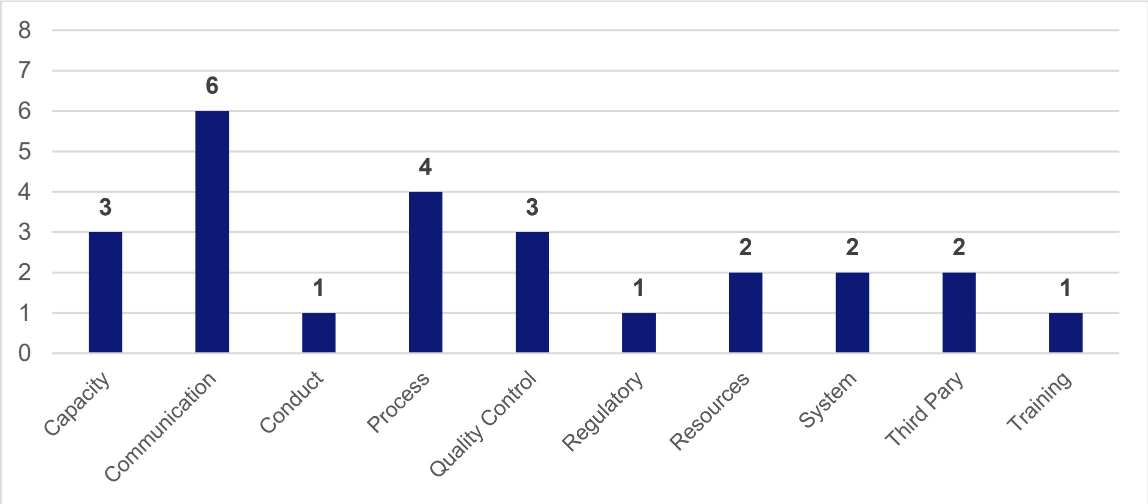

Figure 13: Root causes identify (upheld / partially upheld stage 2 complaints).

Please note that multiple root causes may be identified within a single stage 2 review, meaning total root causes may exceed upheld reviews.

Chapter 3

ICA & PHSO Reviews

3.1 The section below sets out a detailed evaluation of the ICA and PHSO review outcomes, including associated costs and resulting recommendations.

Closed ICA referrals

3.2 A total of 10 ICA reviews were closed by the ICA between April 2025 and March 2026.

Please note that closed case figure may differ from requests received due to carry-over from the previous year, review timeframes, and account for the complexity of complaints.

ICA Review outcomes

3.3 The ICA determines its outcomes based on the same principles applied at stage 1 and stage 2 of the complaints process.

3.4 Of the 10 closed ICA reviews 7 (70%) were not upheld, while 3 (30%) were upheld, either in part or in full. The alignment between the CAA's decisions and those of the ICA demonstrates a consistent and fair approach to complaint resolution.

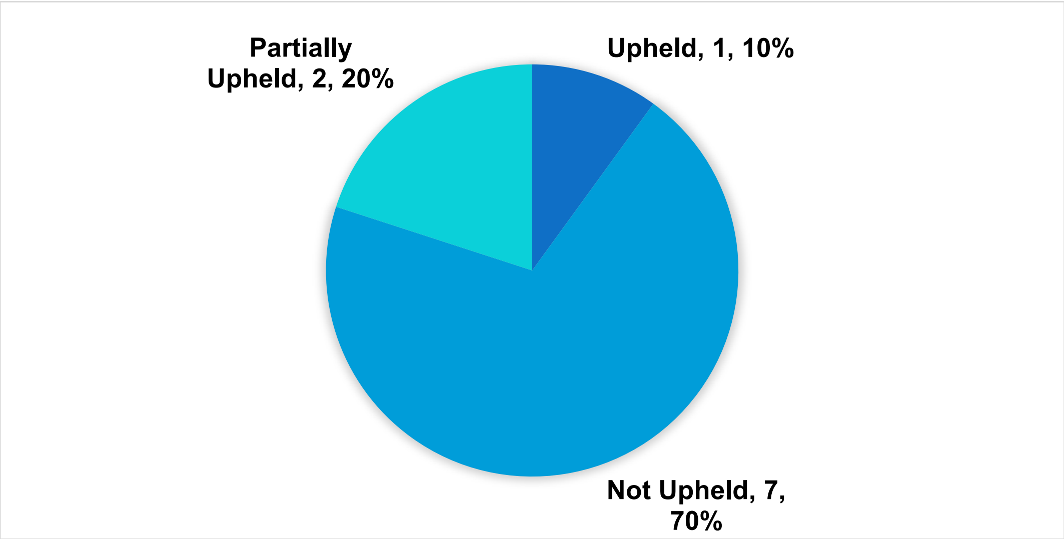

Figure 14: ICA referral outcomes (numbers & percentage).

ICA Recommendations

3.5 The ICA recommended ex gratia payments totalling £320.00 across two cases, in recognition of identified service failures.

ICA Referral costs

3.6 All ICA reviews incur costs to the CAA via the Department for Transport (DfT). Total costs amounted to £7,690.50 between April 2025 and March 2026, representing a 77% increase compared to 2024/25 (£1,756.80), driven by a higher volume of reviews.

Closed PHSO cases

3.7 No PHSO cases were closed during the reporting period, reflecting that no cases were initiated.

Chapter 4
Learning from complaints

4.1 Complaints are a valuable source of insight tool. In this section, we set out what we have learned from complaints, including ICA & PHSO recommendations, root causes, and the actions taken to improve services for customers.

4.2 Complaints help us to better understand the experiences of those using our services, identify trends and highlight recurring issues. They provide an opportunity to reflect, analyse, and transform feedback into meaningful insight enabling us to identify areas for improvement and drive service enhancement.

4.3 Learning from complaints is identified through five key methods, which are as follows:

- **Case by Case learning**

For every complaint received, the designated complaint handler identifies the root cause and any relevant learning arising from the investigation. This informs actions to prevent recurrence and supports ongoing service improvements.

- **Root Cause Analysis**

Root cause analysis is undertaken on a monthly or quarterly basis (depending on volumes) for all upheld or partially upheld stage 1 complaints by the Communications Specialist. This process identifies potential or missed learning.

Emerging insights are discussed with the relevant senior manager to determine whether service improvements should be progressed.

- **ICA & PHSO Recommendations**

As part of ICA or PHSO reviews, recommendations for learning or suggested actions may be provided. These are considered and agreed with the business area prior to issuing responses to complainants.

- **Quality Assurance Checks**

Quarterly quality assurance checks are undertaken on a random sample of closed complaints to assess compliance with governance and standards. This process helps identify opportunities for process improvements and any training gaps.

- **Regulatory Code Assessment**

Where the relevant criteria are met, complaints are assessed against the principles of the Regulators' Code and reviewed on a quarterly basis to determine compliance and identify learning to supports the ongoing improvement of the complaints service.

4.4 Overall, 49 lessons were identified from complaints closed between April 2025 and March 2026. This represents more than one lesson identified per upheld complaint (39 in total), demonstrating the depth of insight gained.

4.5 The implementation of improvements is monitored on a quarterly basis through regular progress update meetings. During this reporting period, 76 service improvements were implemented.

Please note that the number of service improvement may be higher, as this figure will include improvements implemented from lessons learned identified from 2022 onwards.

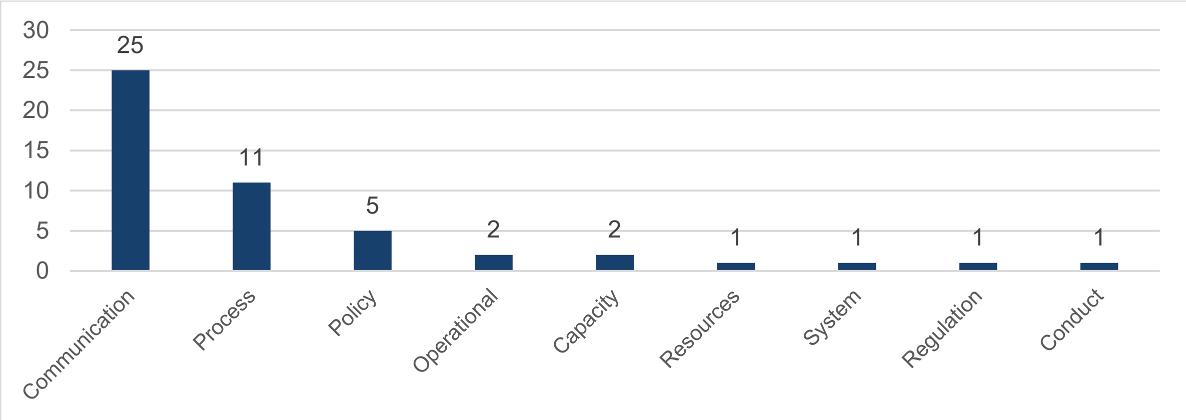

Figure 15: Learning from complaints root cause themes (stage 1 & 2).

4.6 Key root cause themes identified from learning include communication, process, and policy.

4.7 Analysis of the top three root causes identified the following key themes:

Root Cause	Theme	Numbers
Communication	Improve communications with customers	16
	Improve internals communications between teams	3
	Improve information on our website	1
	Improve targeted communications	3
	System error	1
Process	Improve processes	1
	Improve website information	1
	Introduce new processes	1
	Improve compliance with process	3
	Improve consistency in process delivery	5

Root Cause	Theme	Numbers
Policy	Revise & improve policies	2
	Improve compliance with policies	2
	Improve consistency in policy delivery	1

Table 6: Themes relating to the learning root causes (stage 1 & 2)

Learning outcomes

4.8 Learning outcomes have been established to capture and categorise overarching themes derived from the service improvements associated with the root cause of complaints. The key themes identified are process, communication, and quality control.

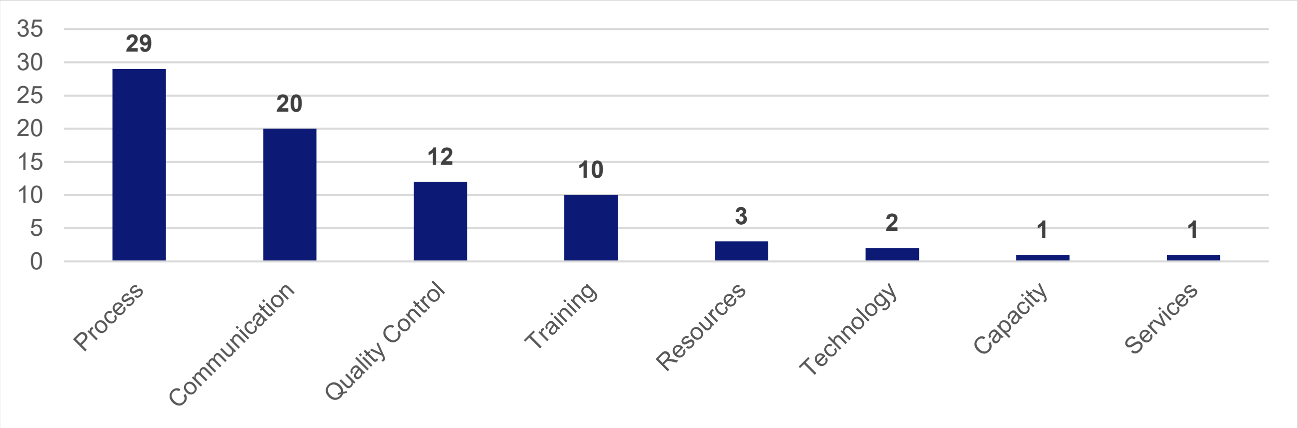

Figure 16: Overarching learning outcomes (all complaint stages & learning mechanisms)

ICA Learning Recommendations

4.9 When the ICA completes a review of a complaint, they may make recommendations for learning or suggest actions to be taken. These are recorded as part of our complaint learning process. Any recommendations or actions must be agreed by the relevant business area before the ICA issues their final response.

4.10 Following completed reviews, the ICA made two recommendations, identifying communication and process as root causes. These are currently in progress.

PHSO Learning Recommendations

4.11 There were no PHSO cases during the reporting year; therefore, no learning has been identified.

Actions taken through learning from complaints

4.12 The examples below demonstrate how learning from complaints has been used to inform service improvements and drive changes across CAA services.

Service Improvements

- Improved communication for Flight Crew Licencing (FCL) applications through enhanced guidance on the website.
- Introduction of the SORA online application to support UAS OSC applications, reducing processing times and improving the customer experience.
- Introduction of an Engineer Licencing (ENL) system to support Part-66 applications, removing the requirement to upload identification (ID), improving the customer experience.
- Regular meetings have been established between Shared Services and Airworthiness teams to address concerns and challenges in application processing, helping to reduce delays, improving the customer experience.
- Communication during audits has been improved by discussing findings that may result in rejection with the organisation in advance of issuing a formal letter of findings.
- Introduction of SORA UK for Operating Safety Case (OSC) drone applications has improved the customer experience through enhanced communication and case management processes.
- Updated criteria and process documentation for categorising and amending safety severity in audit findings to promote consistency.
- Improved internal processes for handling licence applications through enhanced communication on application status.
- Introduced a digital form for Part-66 applications and improved internal processes to enhance communication with customers and strengthen case management.
- Refresher training and enhanced guidance has been provided for call handlers, strengthening the quality and consistency of customer communications and improving the customer experience.
- The complaint acknowledgement template has been improved to ensure complainants are informed at an early stage if any element falls outside scope, with a clear explanation provided.

Chapter 5
Conclusion

5.1 The 2025/26 reporting period demonstrates continued progress reducing overall complaint volumes, indicating a sustained service improvements and a stronger focus on learning are having a positive impact. However, this improvement is set against a notable rise in escalations, highlighting a shift in complaints rather than a simple reduction in customer dissatisfaction.

5.2 The increase in stage 2 and ICA escalations point to an ongoing need to strengthen the clarity, completeness and quality of responses at the earliest stage.

5.3 The persistence of core themes, particularly communication, process and quality, reinforces that many of the underlying drivers of complaints remain unchanged. Addressing these effectively will be critical in reducing repeat issues and improving customer confidence. Encouragingly, the volume of learning identified and the range of service improvements implemented demonstrate a mature and embedded approach to using complaints as a source of insight.

5.4 Overall, we are performing well against our service standards and continue to demonstrate strong operational delivery. The next phase of improvements will depend on translating timely complaint handling into consistently high-quality outcomes, ensuring that issues are fully resolved at the first opportunity and reducing the need to escalate.

Our plan for improving complaint handling at the CAA

5.5 There remains further work to strengthen and enhance our approach to complaint. Our focus for the coming year will be on the following key areas:

- **Embed the Regulators code -** Using the outcomes of our self-assessment against the Regulators Code to identify and implement targeted improvements.
- **Supporting colleagues through training and guidance -** Continuing to build capability across the organisation by providing clear guidance, targeted training and ongoing support to those involved in complaint handling.
- **Improving the quality of stage 1 responses -** Strengthen the clarity, completeness and consistency of responses at the initial stage to ensure issues are fully addressed and to reduce avoidable escalations.

- **Enhancing customer insight and feedback -** Developing approaches to gather and use customer feedback more effectively, enabling us to better understand customer experience and identify opportunities for complaint handling improvement.

APPENDIX A

Definitions

Complaint = an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by us, affecting an individual or group of customers / stakeholders.

Stage 1 = The initial stage of the CAA complaints process.

Stage 2 = An escalated complaints where the customer remains dissatisfied with the stage 1 response.

ICA = An external review stage where complaints are escalated if the customer remains dissatisfied following the stage 2 outcome.

PHSO = An independent review stage where complaints are escalated if the customer remains dissatisfied following the outcome of an ICA review.

Upheld = The service did not meet the expected standard, and a service failure has been identified

Partially Upheld = Evidence of service failure has been identified in one or more aspects of the complaint, although other elements may not be upheld.

Not Upheld = The service provided met the expected standard, and no service failure has been identified.

APPENDIX B

Key Performance Indicators

KPI 1: Total number of complaints received = This indicator measures the total number of stage 1 complaints received by the CAA.

KPI 2: Number of complaints escalated at each stage = This indicator measures the number of complaints escalated beyond stage 1 to stage 2, the ICA and / or the PHSO.

KPI 3: Percentage of complaints acknowledged within 5 working days at each stage = This indicator measures the percentage of stage 1 and stage 2 complaints that are acknowledged within 5 working days, measured from the date of receipt.

KPI 4: Percentage of draft responses received from the business area within 15 working days at each stage = This indicator measures the percentage of stage 1 and stage 2 complaints for which a draft response is received from the relevant business area within 15 working days.

KPI 5: Average time taken (in working days) for the business areas to provide a draft response at each stage = This indicator measures the average time, in working days, taken for a draft response to be provided to the complaints team by the relevant business area.

KPI 6: Percentage of complaints responded to within 20 working days at each stage = This indicator measures the percentage of all stage 1 and stage 2 complaints that are responded to within 20 working days, measured from the date of the acknowledgment.

KPI 7: Average time taken (in working days) to respond to a complaint at each stage = This indicator measures the average time, in working days, taken to provide a full response to the complainant at stage 1 and stage 2.

KPI 8: Number and percentage of complaints where an extension has been authorised at each CAA stage = This indicator measures the number and percentage of complaints at stage 1 and stage 2 where an extension has been authorised.

KPI 9: Outcome of complaints at each stage (upheld / not upheld / partially upheld) = This indicator measures the number and percentage of complaints at each stage where the outcome has been recorded as upheld, not upheld or partially upheld.

KPI 10: Percentage of ICA referral requests acknowledged within 15 working days = This indicator measures the percentage of ICA referral requests that are acknowledged within 15 working days, measured from the date of receipt.

KPI 11: Percentage of ICA referral request referred to the ICA within 15 working days = This indicator measures the percentage of ICA referral requests that are referred to the ICA within 15 working days, measured from the date of receipt.

KPI 12: Average time (in working days) for a complaint to be referred to the ICA = This indicator measures the average time, in working days, taken for an ICA referral request to be referred to the ICA.

APPENDIX C

Complaint handling quick guide

Raising concerns / Informal Complaint

We encourage you to contact the relevant business area in the first instance if you have any queries, concerns, or issues. They will aim to respond promptly.

If the matter requires a more detailed investigation, you can raise a formal complaint. We operate a two-stage complaints procedure.

Stage 1

You can make your complaint in person, by phone, by email or in writing.

We will acknowledge receipt within 5 working days and aim to respond within 20 working days. If more time is needed, we will inform you.

Some complaints may follow alternative processes, and we will let you if this applies.

If you are dissatisfied with our response, you can request escalation to stage 2 within 28 days of receiving your stage 1 response.

Stage 2

A senior manager who has not previously been involved will review the handling of your stage 1 complaint.

We will acknowledge your request within 5 working days and aim to respond within 20 working days. If more time is needed, we will inform you.

If you remain dissatisfied with our stage 2 response, you can request a referral to the ICA within 3 months of receiving our response.

Independent Complaint Assessors (ICA)

If, after completing all stages of our internal complaint process, you remain dissatified, you can contact the CAA's Communications Specialist to request a referral to the ICA.

The ICA will respond directly to you with their findings and recommendations and will copy the CAA into their response.

Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO)

If, following an ICA review, you remain dissatisfied with the outcome, you can contact your Member of Parliament (MP) and ask for your complaint to be referred to the PHSO.