

# Complaints / Compliments

## Annual Report

### 2020-21



# COMPLAINTS / COMPLIMENTS ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

**WORKING TOGETHER**    **EXCELLENCE**    **OPENNESS & HONESTY**    **COMPASSION**

## Introduction

This report gives an overview of complaints and other feedback received from patients, their carers and family members by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust from 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021.

The Belfast Trust is one of the largest integrated health and social care Trusts in the United Kingdom.

We deliver treatment and care to approximately 358,000 citizens in Belfast and provide the majority of regional specialist services to all of Northern Ireland. We have an annual budget of £1.9bn and a workforce of approximately 22,000 staff (full time & part time). Belfast Trust also comprises the major teaching and training hospitals in Northern Ireland.

Our vision is to be one of the safest, most effective and compassionate health and social care organisations, and we recognise the importance and value of service users' opinions regarding the treatment and care we provide. As such we work to have effective processes for managing concerns, complaints and compliments about any aspect of care or treatment provided or commissioned by the Belfast Trust in hospital or community settings.

The Trust received a total of **1,168** formal complaints during the past year, and **8,277** formally reported compliments about our services.

We strive to ensure that all patients have a positive experience of our services, however there may be times when treatment or care do not meet expectations particularly when something has gone wrong or fallen below standard.

By listening to people about their experience of healthcare, the Trust can identify new ways to improve the quality and safety of services and prevent similar problems happening in the future.

We place a real focus across the Trust on making sure that lessons from complaints are taken on board and followed up appropriately, sharing these lessons across other Service Areas and Health and Social Care Trusts where the learning can be applied in settings beyond that of the original ward / department

## How we listen

**IF YOU HAVE A  
COMPLAINT  
ABOUT OUR  
SERVICES, WE  
WANT TO HEAR  
FROM YOU!**

Anyone who uses any of our services can complain. You can also complain on someone else's behalf (you will generally need their written consent to do so).

Your complaint will be investigated thoroughly and confidentially. We aim to respond to your complaint in full within 20 working days, to address your concerns and let you know of any actions taken as a result.

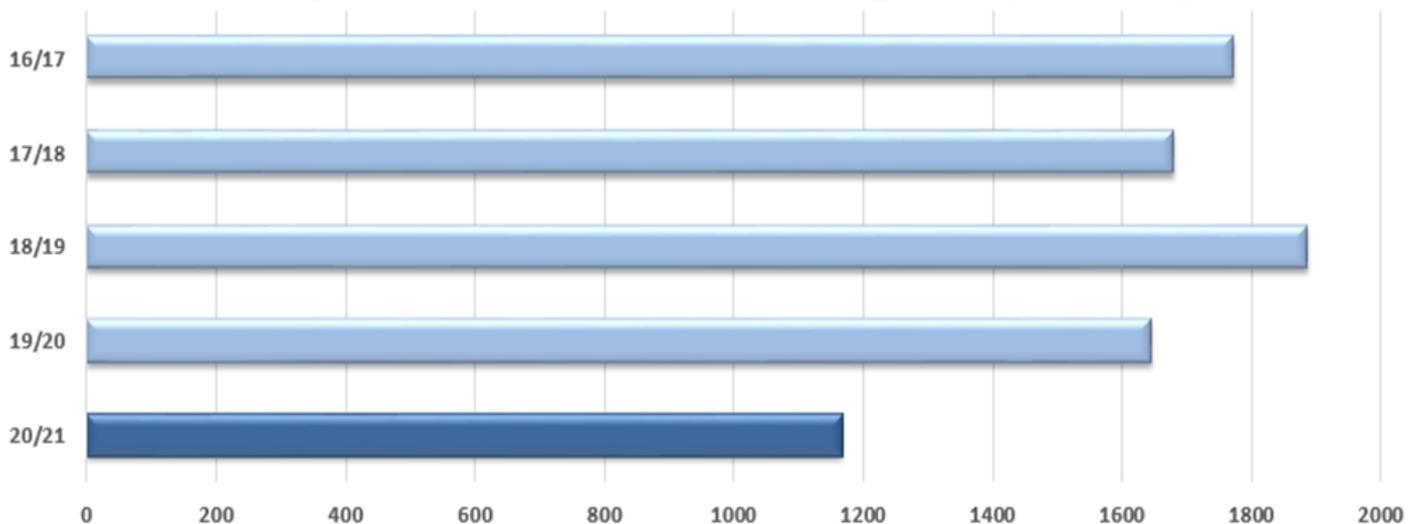
Some complaints may however take longer to resolve than others. We will contact you to explain if this is the case with your complaint, and we will continue to keep in touch with you while we work to provide you with a response.

# What we do

In a normal year the average activity levels across the Trust include:

- Delivers 329,000 District Nursing visits
- Delivers care to 7,300 people supported in their own homes
- Is responsible for 251 children on the Child Protection Register, 871 Looked After Children and over 3,500 children and young people in need.
- Delivered 4940 babies in 2020-21
- Delivers 185,000 + attendances at Emergency Departments
- Cares for 64,000 day case patients
- Cares for 20,000 elective inpatients
- Cares for 43,000 non-elective inpatients
- Cares for 562,000 outpatients, including 18,000 with procedures undertaken
- Delivers 18,000 critical care bed days including Paediatric ICU, Regional ICU, HDU and Special Care Baby Unit
- Delivers 8,200 Cardiology procedures
- Has over 130 partnerships + more than 1,000 contracts with community, voluntary and private sector organisations
- Is supported by 350 volunteers
- Staff liaise with and provide support and advice to carers through a network of family carers (estimated to be in the region of 40,000)

## Formal Complaints received during the past 5 years



## Friends and Family Test

Based on 4188 inpatients surveyed between July 2020 - end March 2021\* on the Trust's acute hospital sites:

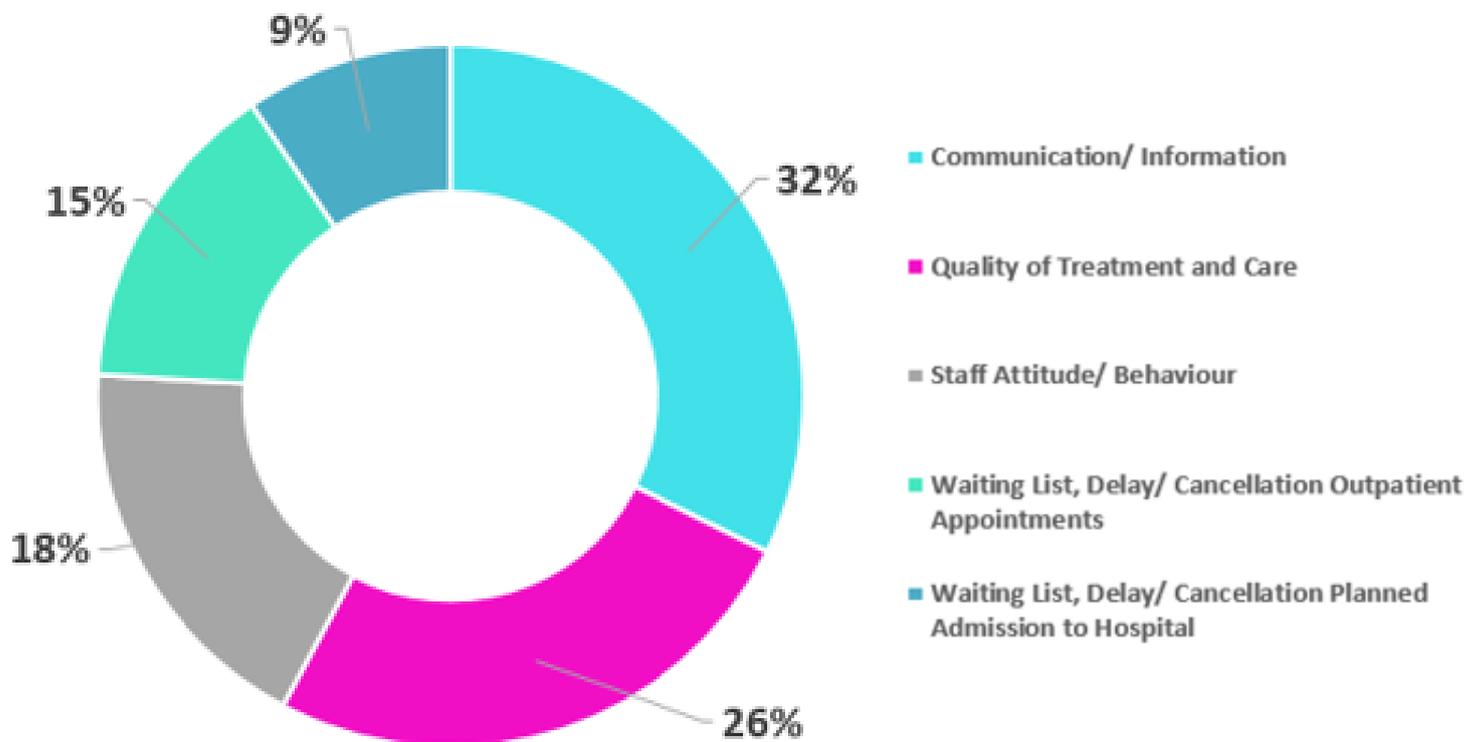
**98.34%** of patients were likely or extremely likely to recommend the care & treatment they received to a friend or family member

\* surveys were paused during the first Covid-19 surge so no surveys were undertaken during April - June 2020

# What you said

The most frequent reasons for complaints about our services during 2020-21 are shown below:

## Top 5 Complaints Subjects 2018-19

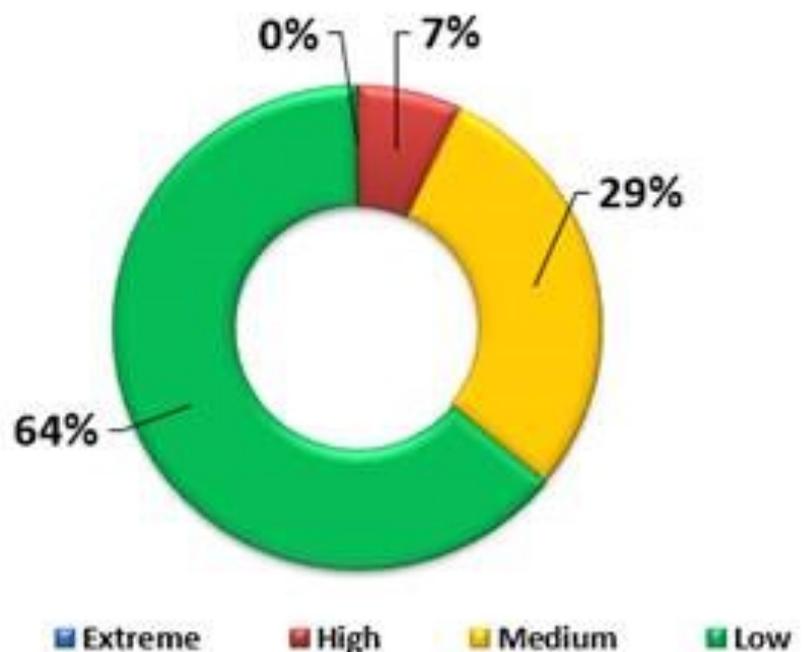


All complaints received by the Trust are assessed against the Trust's risk evaluation matrix and are **graded** as either Low, Medium, High or Extreme risk by the Complaints Team in conjunction with the relevant Service Area(s).

This grading determines the most appropriate action to be taken in response to the complaint, including the type of investigation to be undertaken, and notification of the issues identified to senior staff.

The chart opposite shows an overview of the complaints received during 2020-21 by their grade.

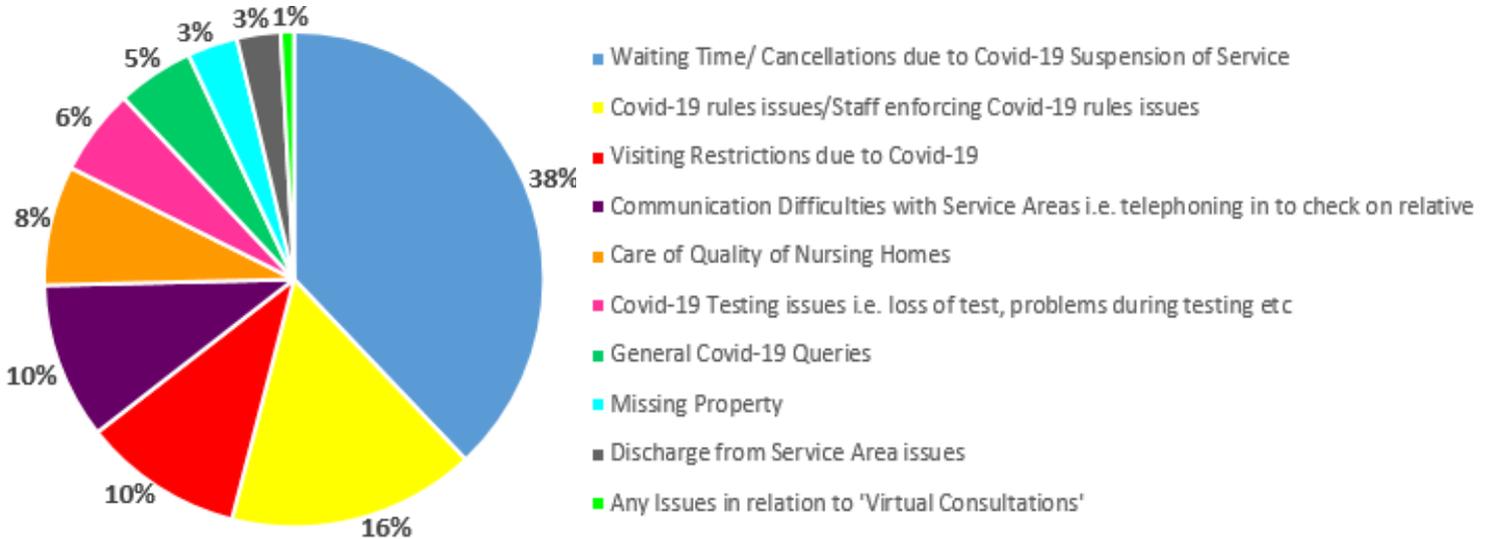
A higher proportion of medium and high risk complaint issues was noted this year due to the public's disinclination to raise more minor issues during the pressures of the pandemic.



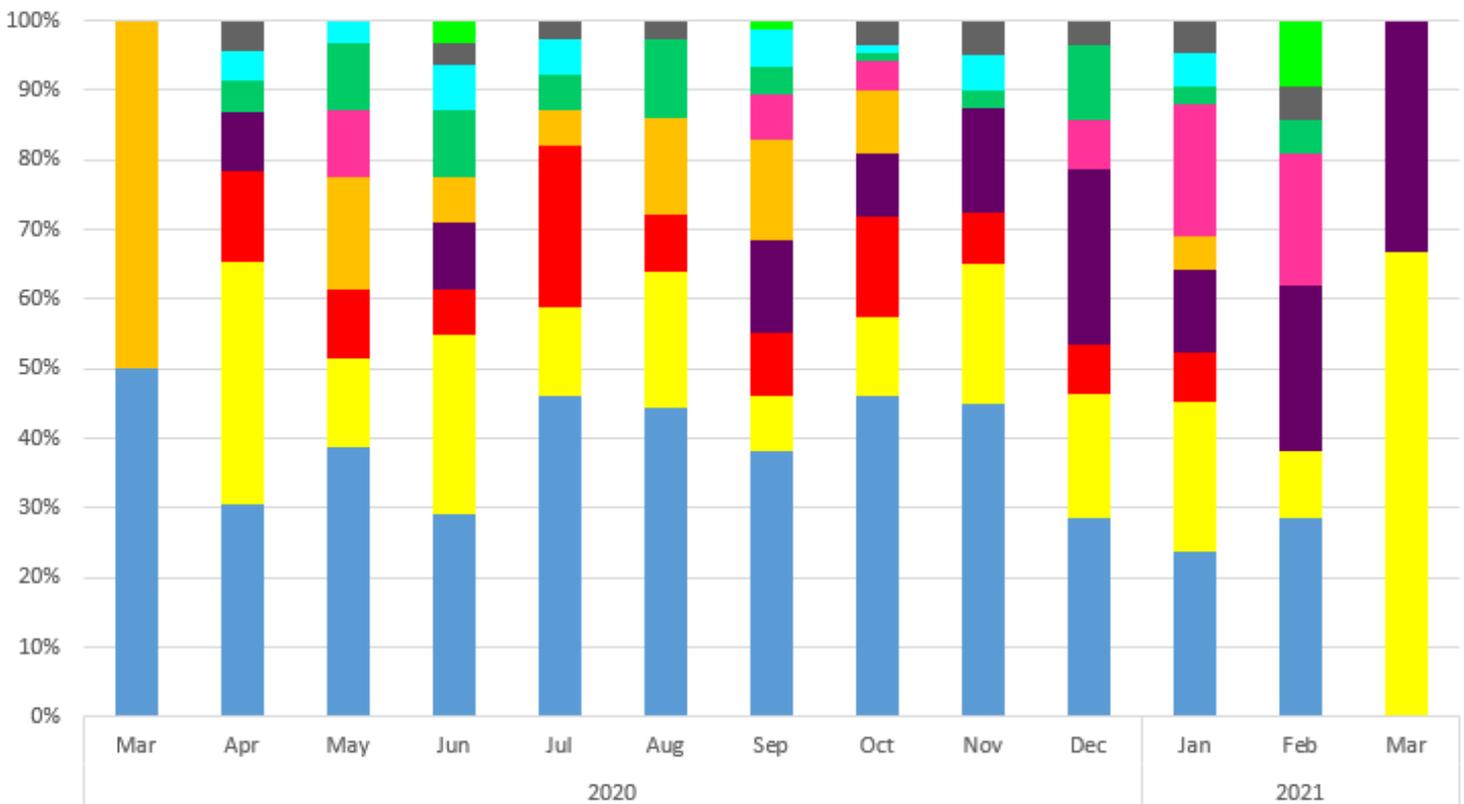
## Complaints Data Review: Covid-19 One Year On

A total of **461** concerns/ issues were raised in relation to COVID-19 during Mar 2020–Mar 2021. This figure includes any concerns/issues included in formal complaints, frontline complaints, and general enquiries that were reported to the Complaints Department.

These Covid-related complaint issues were categorised as follows:



The areas being complained about in relation to Covid changed as the pandemic situation developed, and the chart below shows how the issues causing concern changed throughout the 2020-21 year:

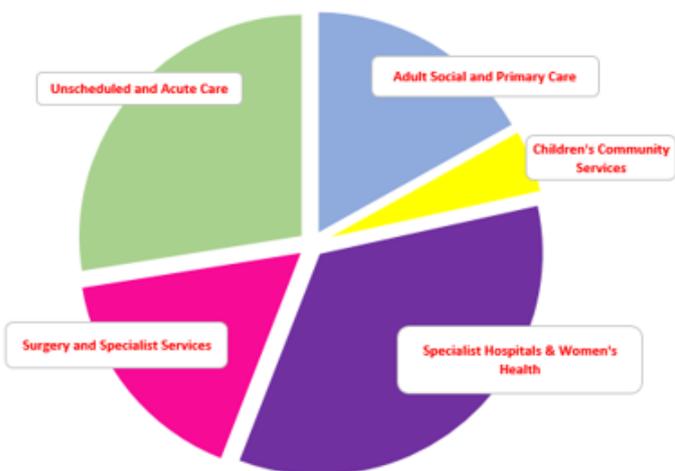


*The Trust would like to sincerely thank service users and their loved ones for their consideration and patience regarding the operation of our complaints processes during 2020-21, particularly where the unprecedented pressures and demands of Covid-19 on our staff meant that responses to complaints were delayed.*

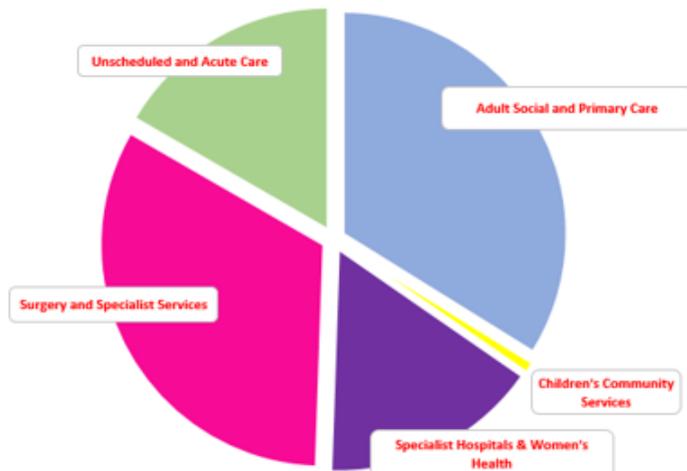
# What you said

The services provided by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust are organised into Directorates. Each year complaints and compliments are received about the clinical specialties and departments within these groupings, and the charts below show a comparative overview of these complaints grouped by Clinical Directorate in 2020-21:

**Clinical Directorate Complaints**

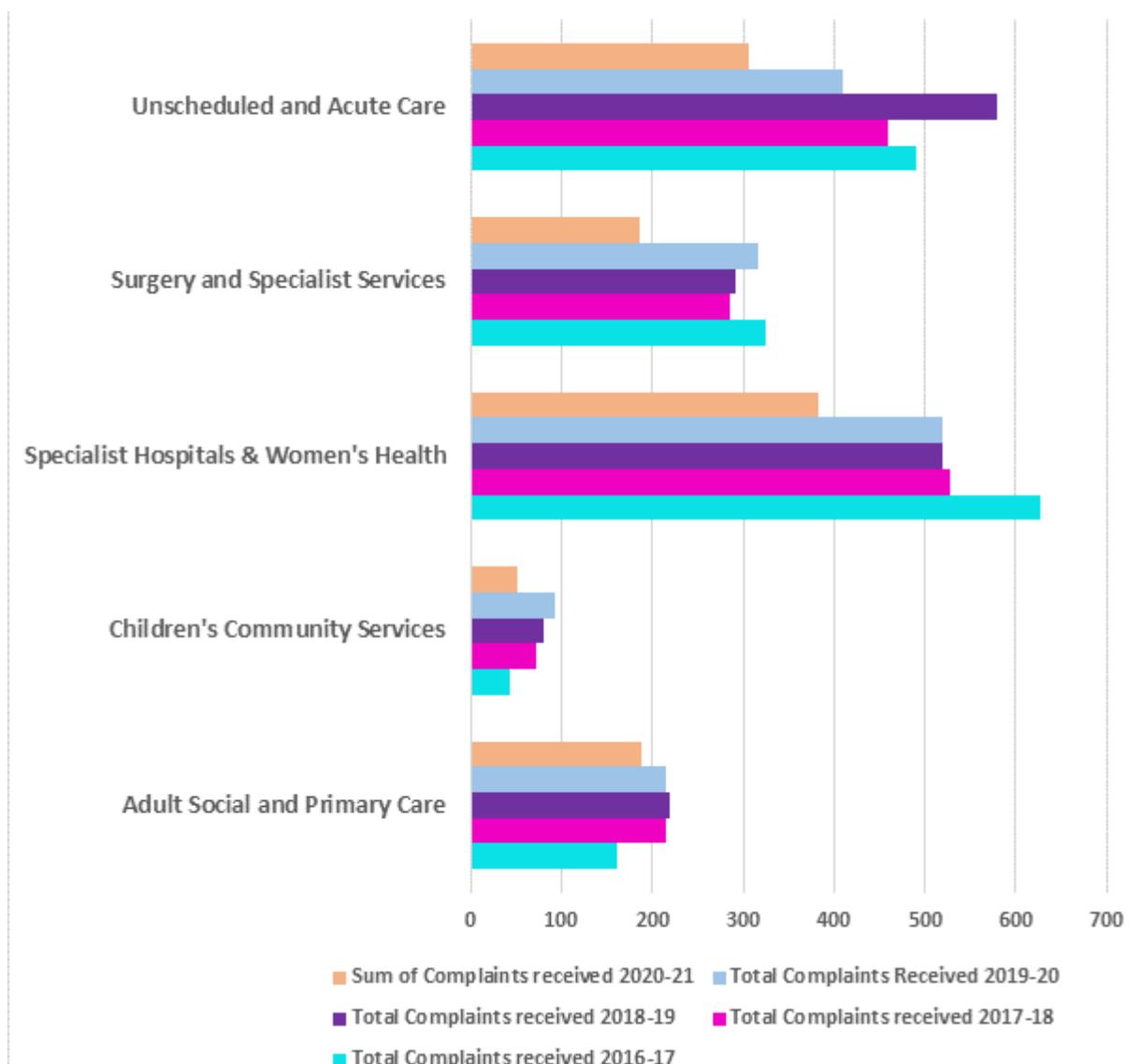


**Clinical Directorate Compliments**



## Complaints

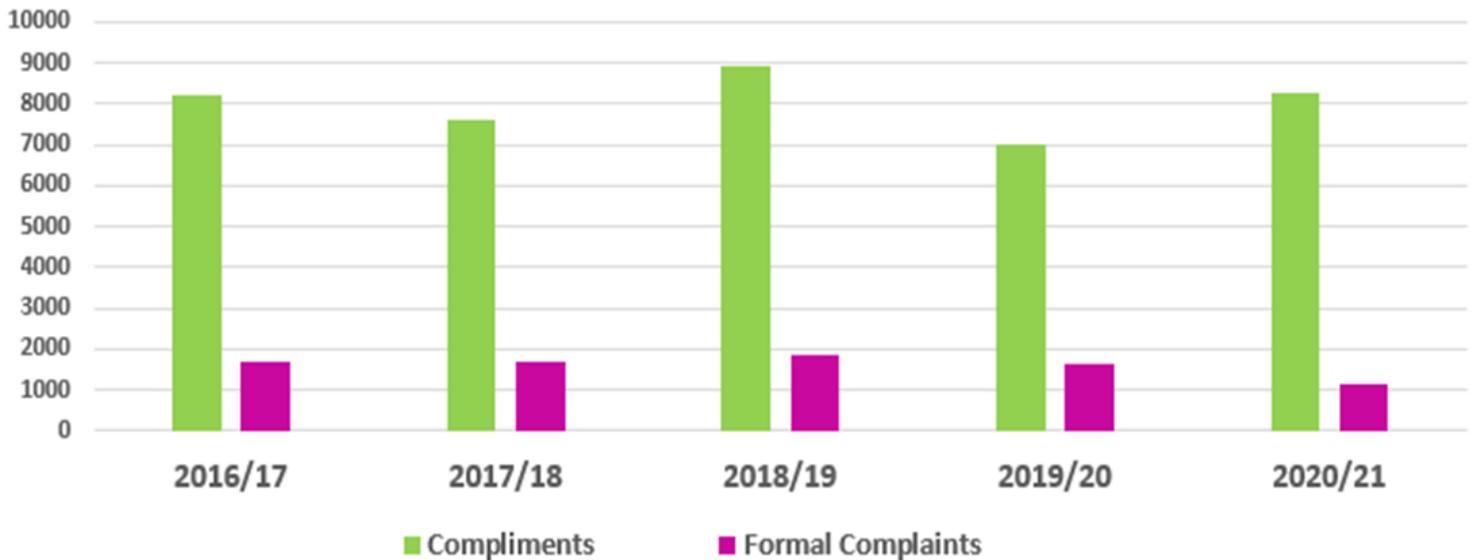
The numbers of complaints received by each area are typically proportionate to their activity levels and to the nature and complexity of the services provided, with larger clinical Directorates receiving greater numbers of complaints. The distribution of **complaints across** the clinical **Directorates** over the past 5 years is shown below



# Compliments

Throughout the year the Trust continued to receive compliments about many aspects of our services.

A total of **8,277** compliments were formally recorded during 2020-21 and the table below shows the numbers of both complaints and compliments received over the past 5 years:



Compliments are very much valued because they provide our patients and clients with an opportunity to share their positive experiences with our staff members, and allow the Trust to learn from areas of good practice and share what is working well in one area across others.

As such we encourage service users to tell us when they have been happy with their experiences. Compliments can be shared with us by phone, face-to-face with staff, in writing, or by email via a dedicated mail box:

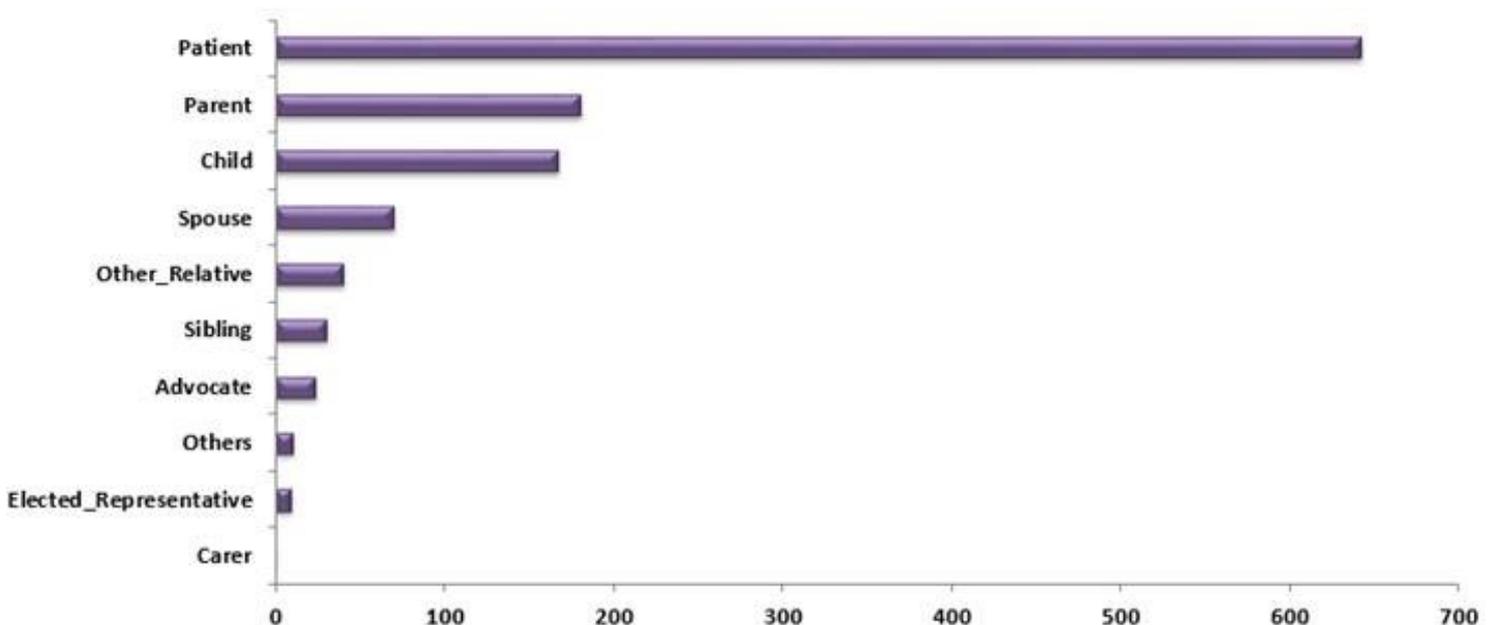
[compliments@belfasttrust.hscni.net](mailto:compliments@belfasttrust.hscni.net)

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## Who Complains?

In 2020-21, the significant majority of complaints continued to be made by the person directly affected by the complaint issues raised.

The chart below shows who raised complaints on behalf of others during this time:



## How we respond - timeliness of complaint responses 2020-21

The Trust's Complaints Department supports our managers and staff working in wards and departments to help ensure that comprehensive and full responses are provided to all complaints in an appropriate and timely way.

During 2020/21 we took an average number of 29.3 working days to provide responses to Complaints. Although the Trust aims to respond to complaints within 20 working days, complex complaints (particularly those that involve a range of services / departments / organisations, or where independent expert opinions are sought) can require additional time to investigate.

The following table shows the response times for the Trust for complaints received during 2020/21:

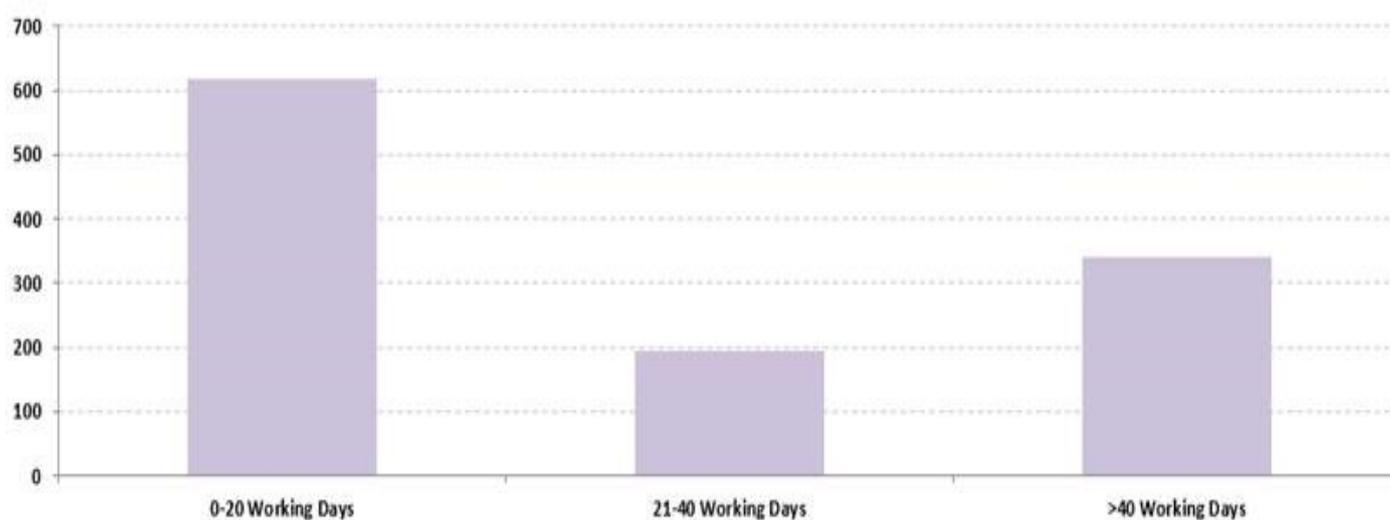
<b>Acknowledgement of complaint within 2 working days</b>	<b>96%</b>
<b>Complaint response within 20 working days</b>	<b>53%</b>
<b>Complaint response within 30 working days</b>	<b>63%</b>

In order to improve the timeliness of our response to complainants, we continued our focus on long outstanding complaints during 2020/21 in particular highlighting cases where investigations and responses had been ongoing for longer than 40 working days.

Regular reports were shared with each of the service-facing Directorates throughout the year identifying all complaint cases in each service area where a response was significantly overdue.

We also encouraged and supported staff to seek to resolve complaints informally within wards and departments wherever possible.

The chart below gives an overview of how long we took to respond to complaints this year:

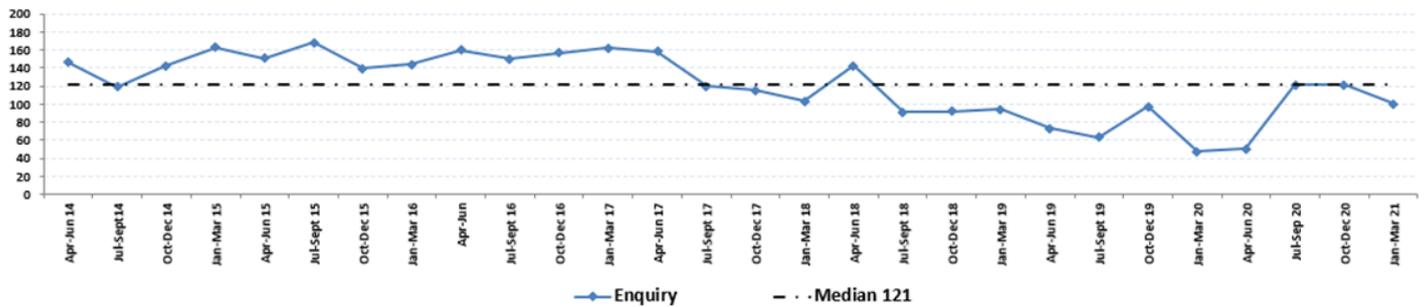


*Although we recognise the need to respond to complaints and concerns as promptly as possible, we feel that this must not be at the cost of providing a **quality** response to complainants. As such, while we continue to seek improvement in the timeliness of our replies, we acknowledge that we did not always meet our target of responding within 20 working days during 2020-21, particularly during the challenges and demands on staff as a result of Covid-19,*

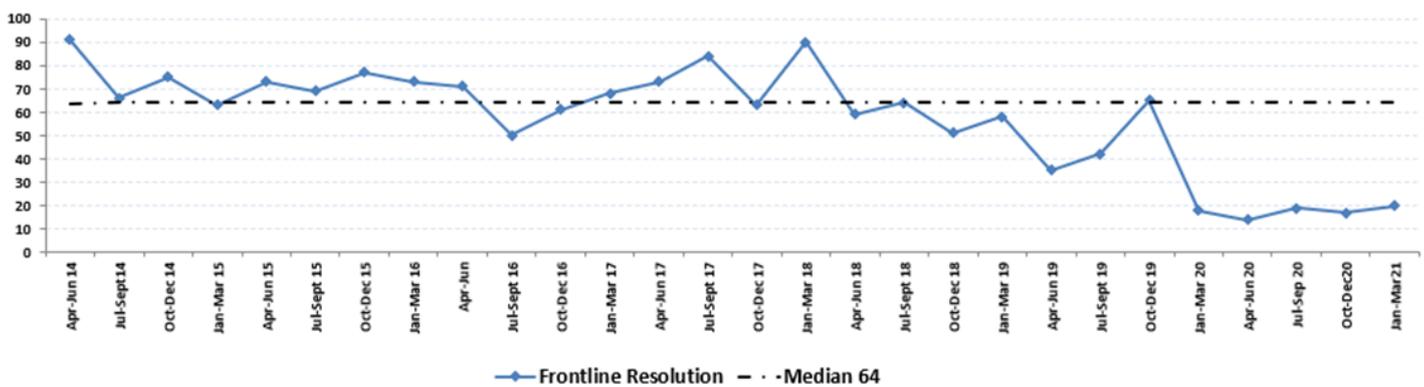
# General Enquiries & Frontline Resolutions

The charts below show the number of general enquiries and service area resolutions recorded from 2014-2020.

“**General Enquiries**” received by the Complaints Team are not subject to the HSC Formal Complaint Procedure, and can generally be resolved relatively quickly. Examples include: enquiries about position on the waiting list, clients unable to contact specific wards/departments, or clients who request that their concerns are not raised as a formal complaint:



The Trust continues to promote the resolving and recording of complaints and concerns at service level e.g. in wards and departments. These cases are also monitored by the Complaints Team under a heading of “**Service Area**” or “**Frontline**” Resolution”:



Complaints Awareness Training is made available to all staff to encourage and facilitate the resolution of patients’ concerns at this frontline level. However all service users may subsequently request that their concerns are further investigated formally by the Trust under the Health and Social Care Complaints Procedure.

## Ombudsman Cases

If patients are not fully satisfied with the outcome from the Trust’s complaints processes they can choose to subsequently raise their concerns with the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.



The Ombudsman’s office assesses each complaint and decides whether the issues raised warrant further investigation.

The Trust produces action plans to ensure that all recommendations arising from Ombudsman reports are implemented. We also promote and review the sharing of learning from Ombudsman recommendations, in this way we make certain that any service improvements are put in place not only in the area where the complaint originally arose, but also in other areas where there is potential for similar issues to arise.

# Learning from Complaints

The Trust endeavours to ensure that where any patient had an experience within our care that did not meet the standards that we expect, this experience is reviewed and any learning is identified and used to inform changes in the way that we deliver our services.

This learning is shared across Trust wards / departments where relevant to help avoid other patients experiencing similar issues in the future.

Some examples of how complaints have led to improvements within the Trust during 2020-21 include the following:

Complaints were received by the Trust relating to care home reviews:

- A Trust keyworker failed to communicate with the service user's family and involve them in the decision making to stop 1:1 supervision arrangements, and subsequent change to the service user's care plan.
- A Trust keyworker failed to communicate with a family following a review where the outcome necessitated a transfer of care home to meet the service user's assessed needs.

These complaints highlighted that the standard expected in relation to individualised care and treatment were not met in relation to family involvement in review of care and care delivery decisions. In addition, the principles and good practice elements within the Department of Health guidance regarding Deprivation of Liberty were not applied and documented.

Both complaints resulted in a breakdown in trust and collaborative partnership working between the family, the Trust keyworker and the care home.

*The complaints were investigated by the Trust and the following learning points were identified and communicated to staff across the Trust via our Shared Learning process:*

- *A service user's Next of Kin must be informed of all changes in their care needs.*
- *Practitioners involved in arranging 1:1 supervisions must adhere to the Adult Community and Older Peoples process for the implementation and review of 1:1 supervision.*
- *Practitioners involved in completing a care review should complete the review report in accordance with Trust processes and ensure that this is shared with family in a timely basis.*

# Learning from Complaints

An example of learning and improvement arising from a complaint that was investigated by the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman in 2020/21 is detailed below:

The complaint concerned a patient who suffered a collapse at home and was transported by ambulance to the Royal Victoria Hospital and subsequently transferred to Craigavon Area Hospital where they sadly passed away. It later emerged that an incorrect patient identifying number was allocated to the patient and they had been treated in both the Belfast and Southern Trusts as a different patient who had the same name and a similar date of birth.

Although this error did not lead to harm to the patient, and did not affect their prognosis, there was clear concern about the impact such an error could potentially have had.

*As a result of the learning from these events and subsequent investigation by the Trust, a new “Management of Unidentified Patients” policy was developed and implemented in order to prevent any future reoccurrence of such an error:*

- *At the point of accepting a patient for admission, Trust staff are now prompted to ask if the patient can confirm their own identity.*
- *If the patient is not able to confirm their own identity, an unidentified patient protocol is enacted where the patient is issued with a unique pre-allocated hospital number and temporary unique identification details as soon as they are admitted to hospital to allow any required emergency treatment to proceed.*
- *The purpose of this emergency identification system is:*
  - ◇ *to ensure that patients of unknown or uncertain identity have appropriate investigation and clinical treatment without delay*
  - ◇ *to ensure that documentation, blood specimens and other investigations can be linked to the patient concerned at all times during their hospital admission*
  - ◇ *to minimise the risk of patient identification error and consequent inappropriate treatment*
  - ◇ *to outline the correct mechanism for merging emergency alternative identifying information with the patient’s correct identification details when these are confirmed.*
- *This temporary identifier is then followed up with the allocation of the patient’s correct identification number when this has been confirmed and cross-checked.*

## What we will be doing in 2021-22

We want to be sure that complaints we receive continue to be appropriately investigated; responded to in reasonable timeframes and in a manner that reflects the key Trust values; and to make certain that learning from complaints is used to inform potential improvements for the future to help make our services the safest, most effective and compassionate they can be.

Key pieces of work will be taken forward during 2021/22 to achieve these aims include:

- ⇒ Working to support Trustwide implementation of enhanced professional assurance processes, and reviewing these processes during the year to ensure their effectiveness. This includes developing and implement a robust system for escalation of concerns in relation to Professional Staff across all staff groups within Service Areas.
- ⇒ Adjusting working practices and procedures to reflect learning from ongoing audits of Complaints Handling processes in the central complaints team in order to improve complaints management processes
- ⇒ Implementing learning arising from an online feedback process allowing complainants to tell us about their experience of complaining.
- ⇒ Improve the identification of learning from complaints and Ombudsman cases, and use this to identify how things can be done better to improve service delivery throughout the Trust.
- ⇒ Continuing to provide training to support improvements in how we respond to complaints.

- ⇒ Continuing to promote the resolution of complaints on the frontline within wards and departments, and working to reduce the length of time taken to investigate and respond to complainants (particularly where responses have not been issued after 40 working days).

In addition we will continue to promote collaborative working on a number of levels to progress these objectives:

- ⇒ between Directorates & the central Complaints Team, including improvements in the data and information provided by the Complaints Team to staff.
- ⇒ between the Trust and external bodies (e.g. Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, Patient Client Council, Department of Health).
- ⇒ Between the Trust's complaints central complaints department and those in other NHS Trusts

We will also continue work to improve our systems for identifying themes in complaint subjects and promoting actions to address these across the Trust.

### *The Complaints Team can be contacted at:*

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust - Complaints Department  
Musgrave Park Hospital  
7th Floor McKinney House  
Stockman's Lane  
Belfast BT9 7JB

Email: [complaints@belfasttrust.hscni.net](mailto:complaints@belfasttrust.hscni.net)

[compliments@belfasttrust.hscni.net](mailto:compliments@belfasttrust.hscni.net)