

# Complaints / Compliments

# Annual Report

## 2022-23



# COMPLAINTS / COMPLIMENTS ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

**WORKING TOGETHER**

**EXCELLENCE**

**OPENNESS & HONESTY**

**COMPASSION**

## Introduction

This report gives an overview of complaints, compliments and other feedback received from patients, their carers and family members by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023.

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

We deliver treatment and care to more than 350,000 citizens in Belfast and provide the majority of regional specialist services to all of Northern Ireland. We have a workforce of almost 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 & social care organisations, and we recognise the importance and value of service users' opinions regarding the treatment and care we provide. As such we continue to 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

**1,633**  
formal  
complaints  
during the  
past year,

and **8,462**  
formally  
reported  
compliments  
about our  
services.

In the patient-centred environment of the Belfast Trust, patients, relatives & carers are encouraged to express their views about the treatment and services that they receive.

It is recognised that although most people will have a positive experience of our services, there may be times when treatment or care do not meet expectations particularly when something has gone wrong or fallen below standard.

Listening to service users about their experience of healthcare allows the Trust to identify ways to improve the quality and safety of services and prevent problems happening in the future. By making sure that lessons from complaints are taken on board and followed up appropriately, services and performance can be greatly improved for the future.

## 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

During 2022-23, services delivered by the Trust included:

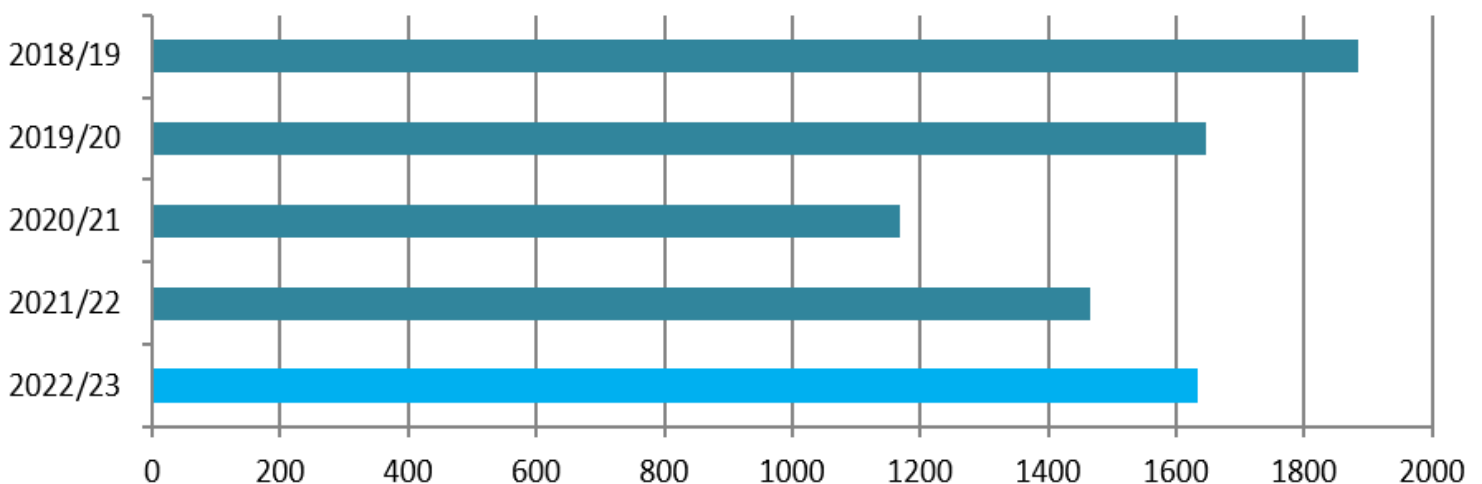
- 190,900 Attendances at our Emergency Departments
- 21,942 District Nursing visits delivered
- 523,100 Patients seen through outpatients clinics & procedures
- 42,100 Non-Elective inpatients cared for
- 4,111 People supported in their own homes
- 21,308 Critical care bed days provided
- 4,708 Babies delivered

## Friends and Family Test

A total of 7,068 surveys were completed across the Trust during 2022-23, including 6,300 inpatient surveys on the Trust's acute hospital sites.

**99.3%** of inpatients were likely or extremely likely to recommend the care & treatment they received to a friend or family member

## Formal Complaints received during the past 5 years

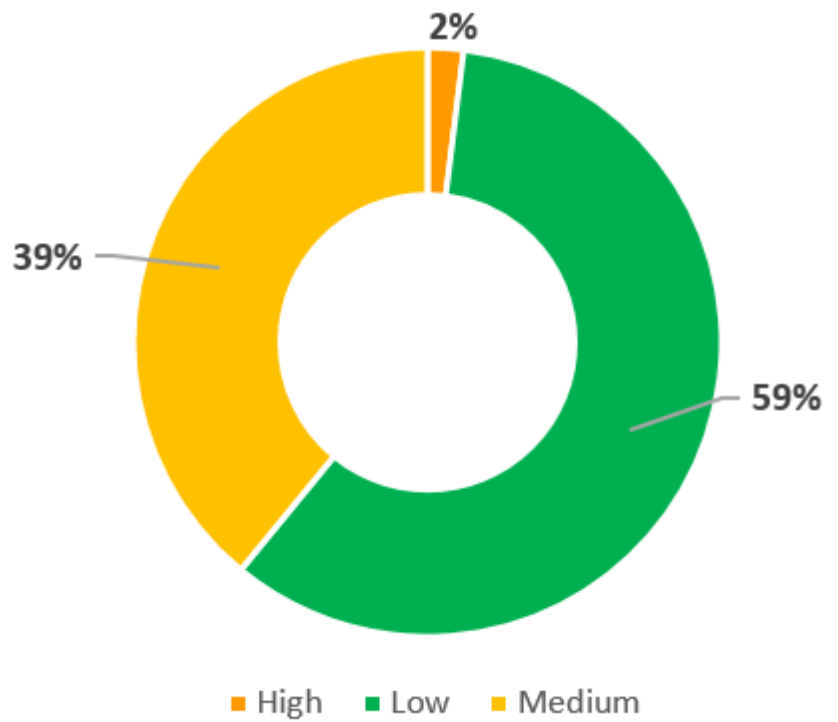


# Grading of complaints

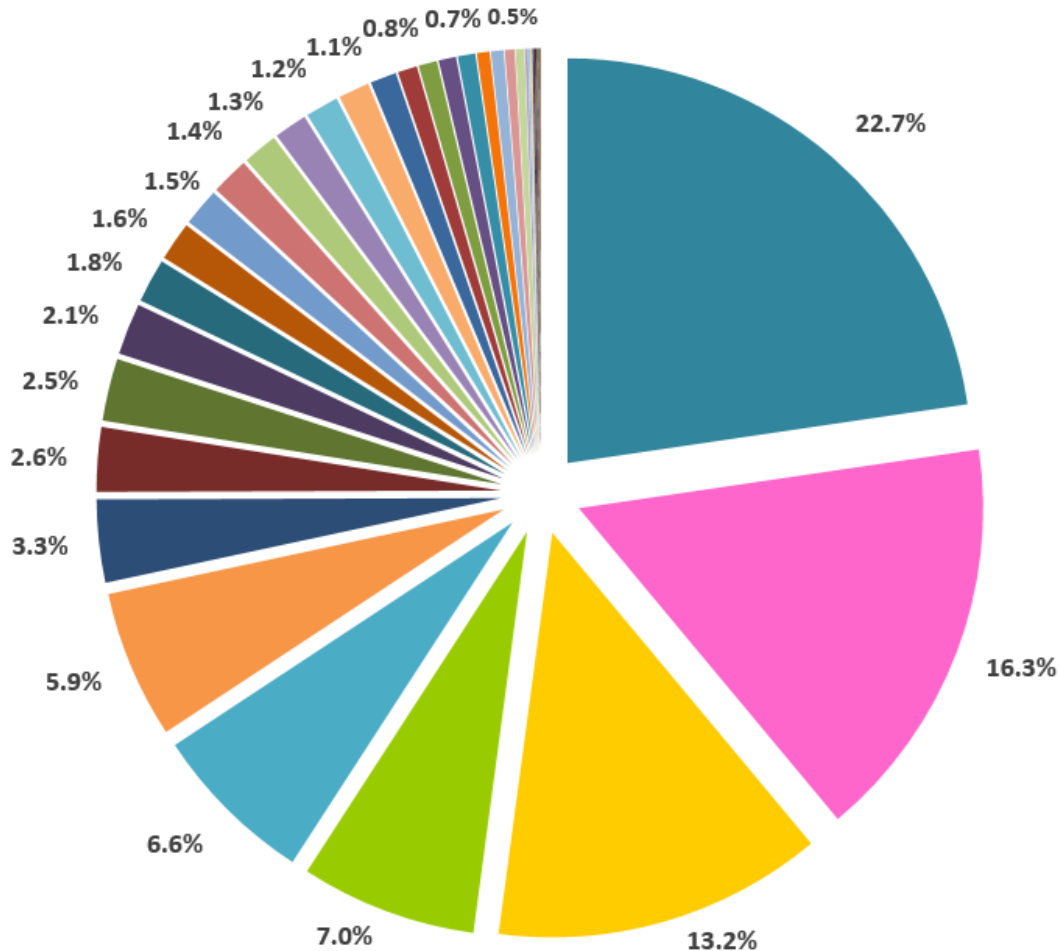
All complaints received by the Trust are assessed against a regional risk evaluation matrix and are **graded** as either Low, Medium, High or Extreme risk by the Complaints Team in conjunction with the relevant Service Area.

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 2022-23 by their grade.



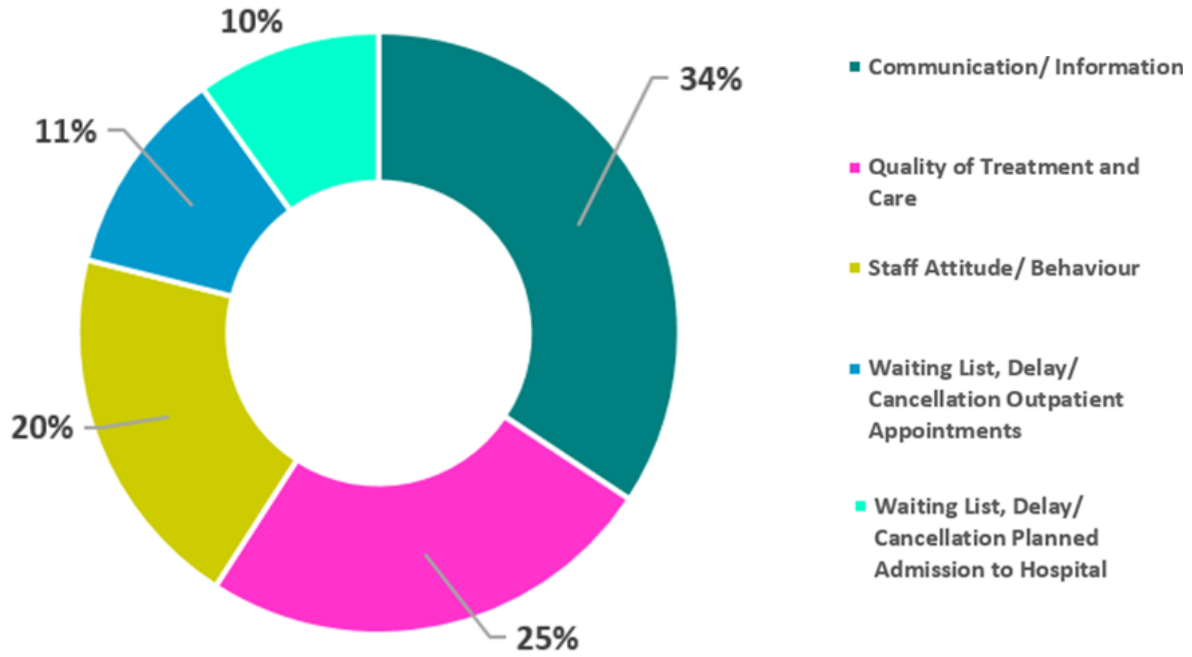
# Subjects of complaints



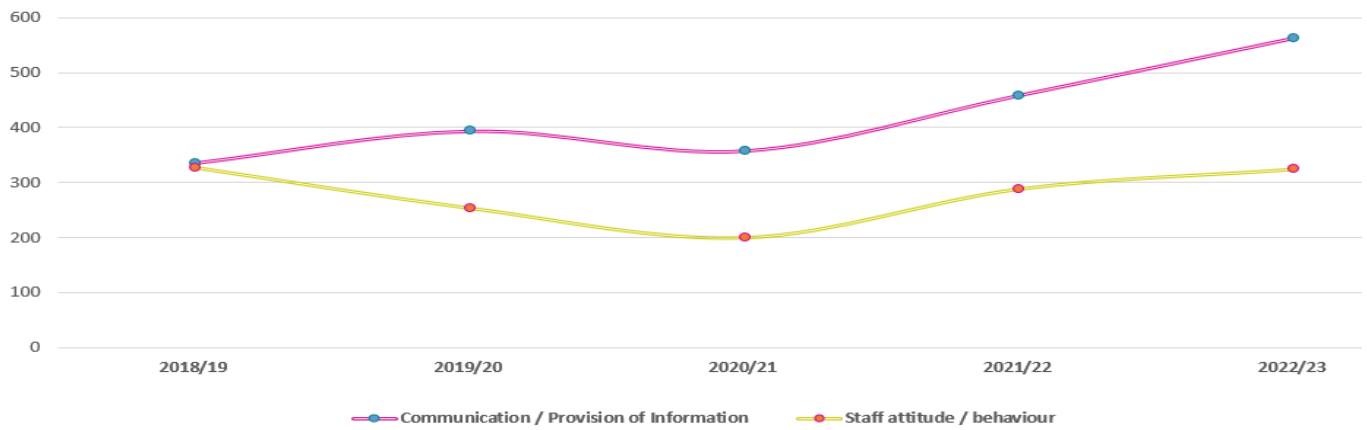
- Communication / Information
- Quality of Treatment & Care
- Staff attitude / behaviour
- Waiting Lists - Outpt Appts
- Waiting Lists - Planned Hospital Adm
- Discharge / Transfers
- Professional Assessment of Need
- Property / Expenses / Finances
- Records / Record-keeping
- Policy / Commercial Decisions
- Discrimination
- Waiting Times - Emergency Depts
- Waiting Times - Community Services
- Environmental issues
- Confidentiality
- Access to Premises
- Delay / Cancellation for Inpts
- Children's Order
- Contracted Regulated Residential Nursing
- Delayed Admission from ED
- Contracted Services
- Contracted Independent Hospital Services
- Contracted Regulated Domiciliary Agency
- Hotel / Support / Security Services
- Transport, Late or Non-arrival
- Other
- Transport, Suitability of Vehicle/ Equipment
- Contracted Regulated Residential Nursing
- Contracted Independent Hospital Services
- Contracted Regulated Domiciliary Agency
- Complaints Handling
- Contracted Regulated Residential Nursing
- Contracted Independent Hospital Services
- Contracted Regulated Domiciliary Agency

# What you said

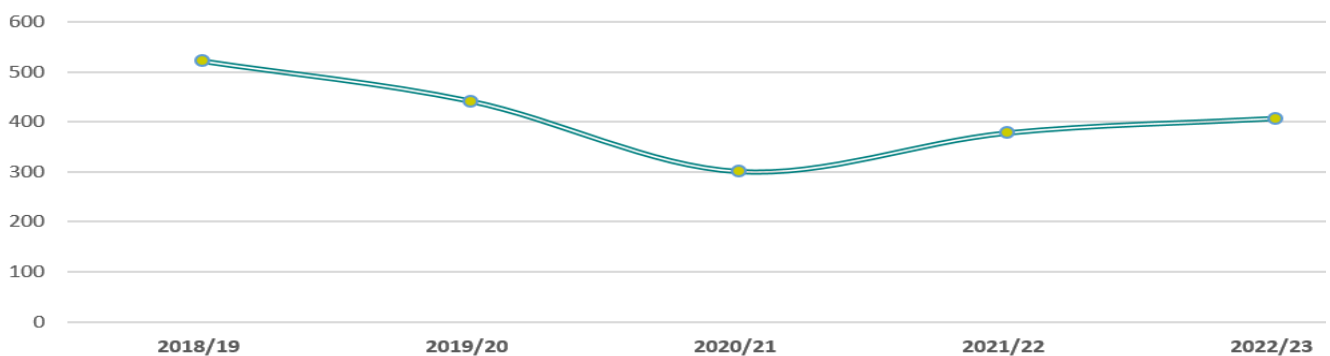
The most frequent reasons for complaints about our services during 2022-23 are shown below:



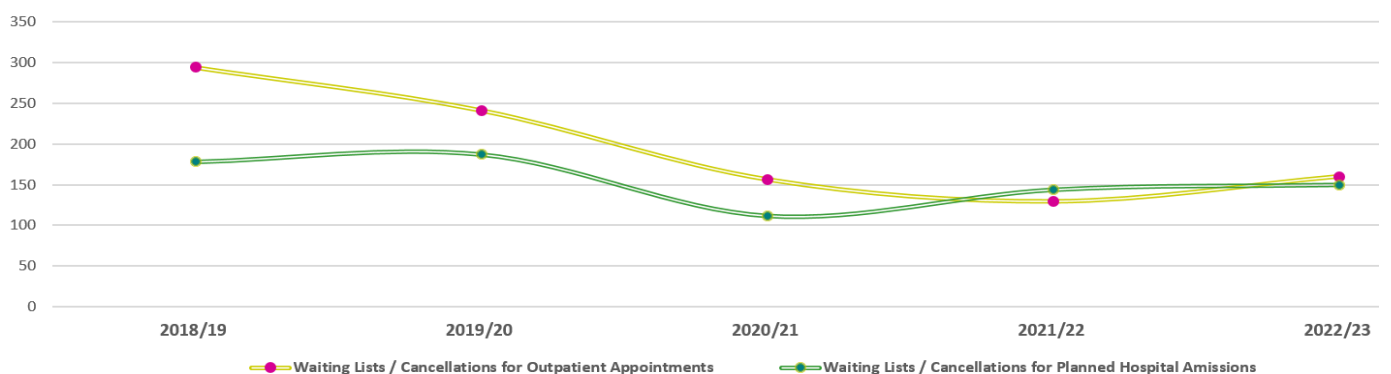
Numbers of complaints received about Staff attitude / behaviour, and Communication / Information:



Numbers of complaints received about Quality of Treatment and Care:



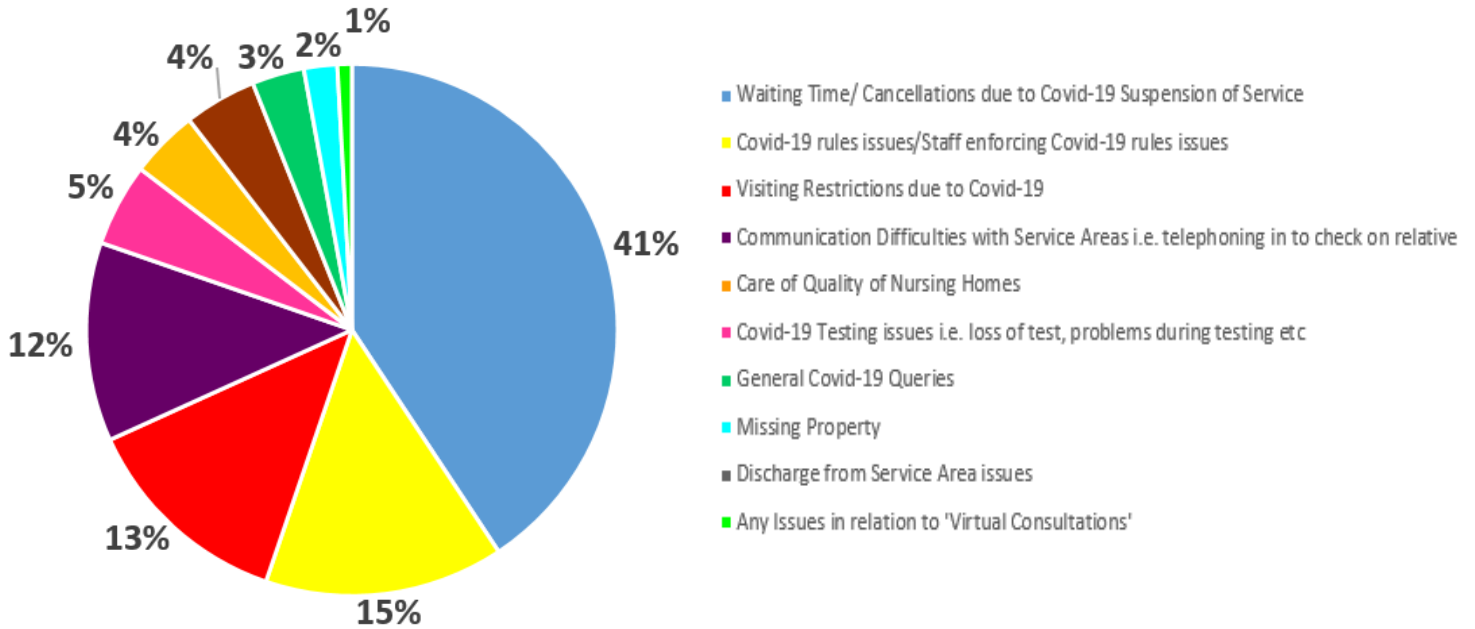
Numbers of complaints received about Waiting Lists / Cancellations:



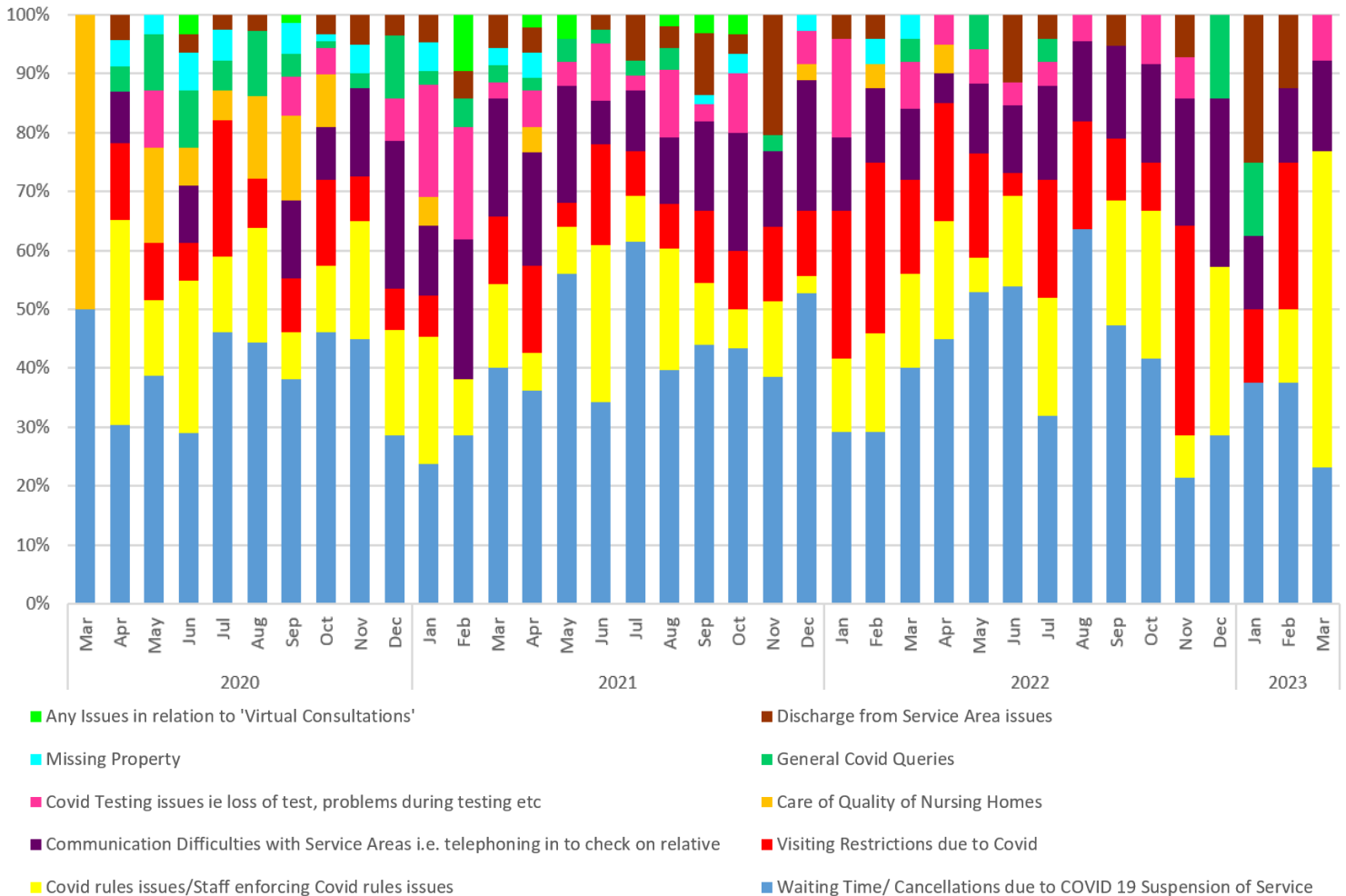
# Complaints Data Review: Covid-19 Three Years On

A total of **315** concerns/ issues were raised in relation to COVID-19 during 2022-23. This figure includes any concerns/issues included in formal complaints, frontline complaints, and general enquiries that were reported to the Complaints Department (NB a single complaint may include multiple issues or concerns).

Covid-related complaint issues received during the year were categorised as follows:



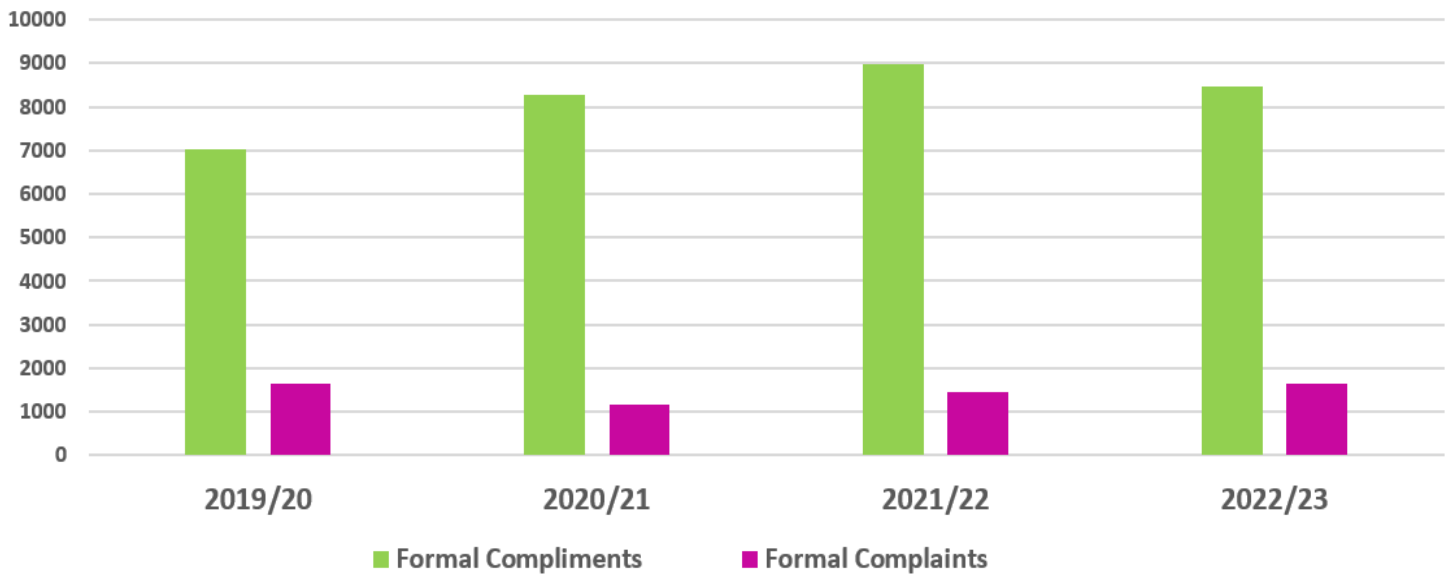
The areas being complained about in relation to Covid have changed as the pandemic situation developed, and the chart below shows how the issues causing concern changed from 2020 to 2023:



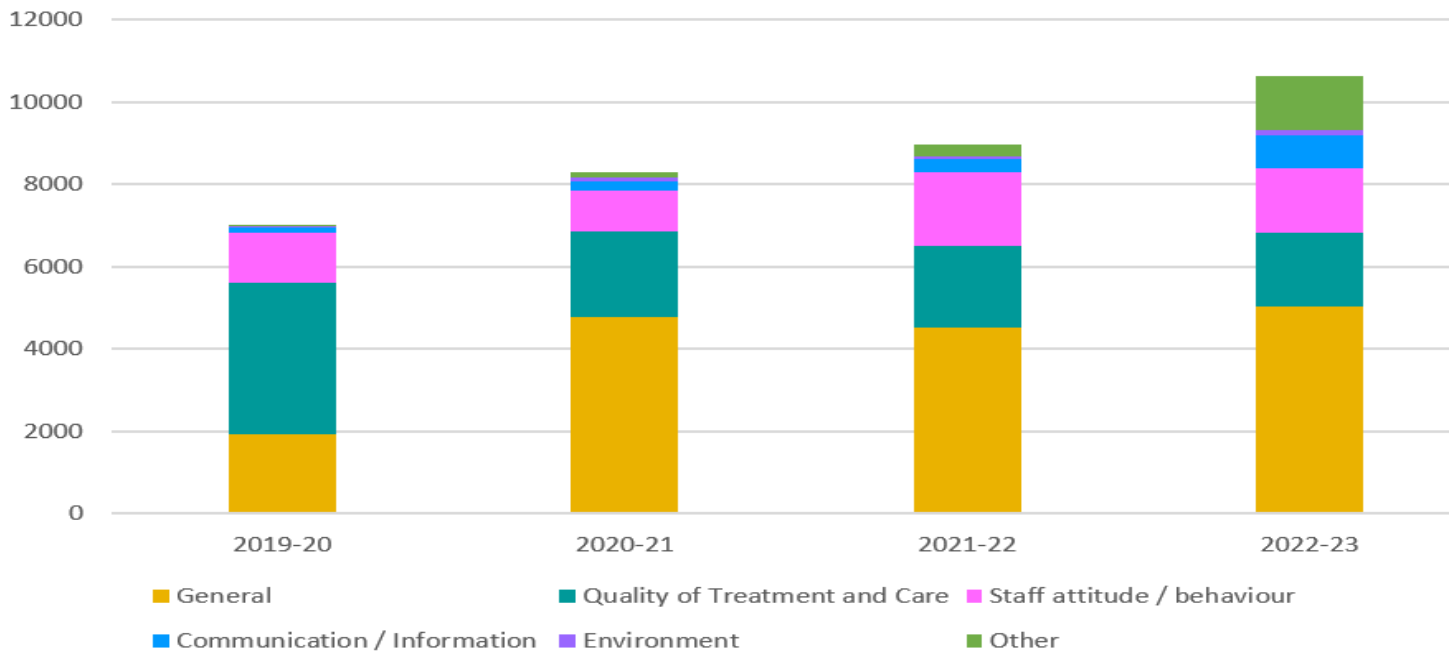
# Compliments

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

A total of **8,462** compliments were formally reported during 2022-23 and the table below shows the numbers of both complaints and compliments received over the past 4 years:



Compliments figures for key subject categories (assigned by the Department of Health) are reported throughout each year. Compliments not falling within these categories are also recorded by the Trust. Details of the subjects of compliments\* shared by service areas with the Trust's complaints department are provided below for the last 4 years:



*\*NB a single compliment may contain positive feedback relating to more than one subject*

Compliments are very much valued throughout the Trust as they provide our service users with an opportunity to share positive experiences with our staff members, and allow service areas to learn from good practice and share what is working well with others.

As such we encourage our patients and clients 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)**

Some examples of compliments received during 2022/23 are shown overleaf:

## Compliments - what you said...

**“Please pass on my thanks for the care provided by your Day of Surgery Staff & Theatre staff. They were all amazing. Thank you.”**

**“A very belated thank you to the Reception, Triage, Majors Ward, Porters and CT Scan Teams.**

**My Father had a serious fall on his head so I took him to A & E.**

**He received excellent care and attention during the time we were there and we are very grateful.**

**He is 89 years young and has made a super recovery even though the bruises on his face were a conversation starter for many weeks afterwards!**

**I am so sorry that I don't have all the names of the staff who looked after my Dad so brilliantly.”**

***“I can't thank Nursing staff enough for the care and attention they showed my daddy whilst he was dying, words can't do it justice and we can't recognise them enough for the hard and special work they do”***

**“Nurses are angels in disguise, I can never thank you all enough for your empathy, understanding and care you all showed me whilst I was an inpatient.”**

**Friday was my first time being admitted to hospital-for breathing difficulties. It was a very busy environment with my first night spent in emergency and my second in a ward A when a bed became available. This highlights the pressures a hospital has and made me appreciate the work they do more.**

**I'd like to compliment all the staff at all points during my stay at the Mater hospital. It was a very busy environment with many changing patients and staff obviously having to keep up with this. Especially when I consider the number of tests and checks I received during the three days**

**Every staff member (cleaners, staff bringing food, nurses, radiologists, doctors, consultants) I encountered was so professional, friendly, thoughtful and helpful. Even when just walking past a comment to ask how you are or someone with a bit of humour all made such a difference.**

**As I didn't expect to be staying in hospital I would add that all above made my stay calmer and relaxed, as obviously there can be a shock value.**

**I would just like to thank them all with this compliment.”**

**I just wanted to send a quick email to say thank you for the care received by my father today at the Mater Hospital in Belfast.**

**He was brought in by ambulance and was quickly seen by staff. He was made to feel like the staff cared about him and wanted to help him. I was also able to speak to his Dr on the phone and received updates from him.**

**My dad is not a man who likes hospitals.**

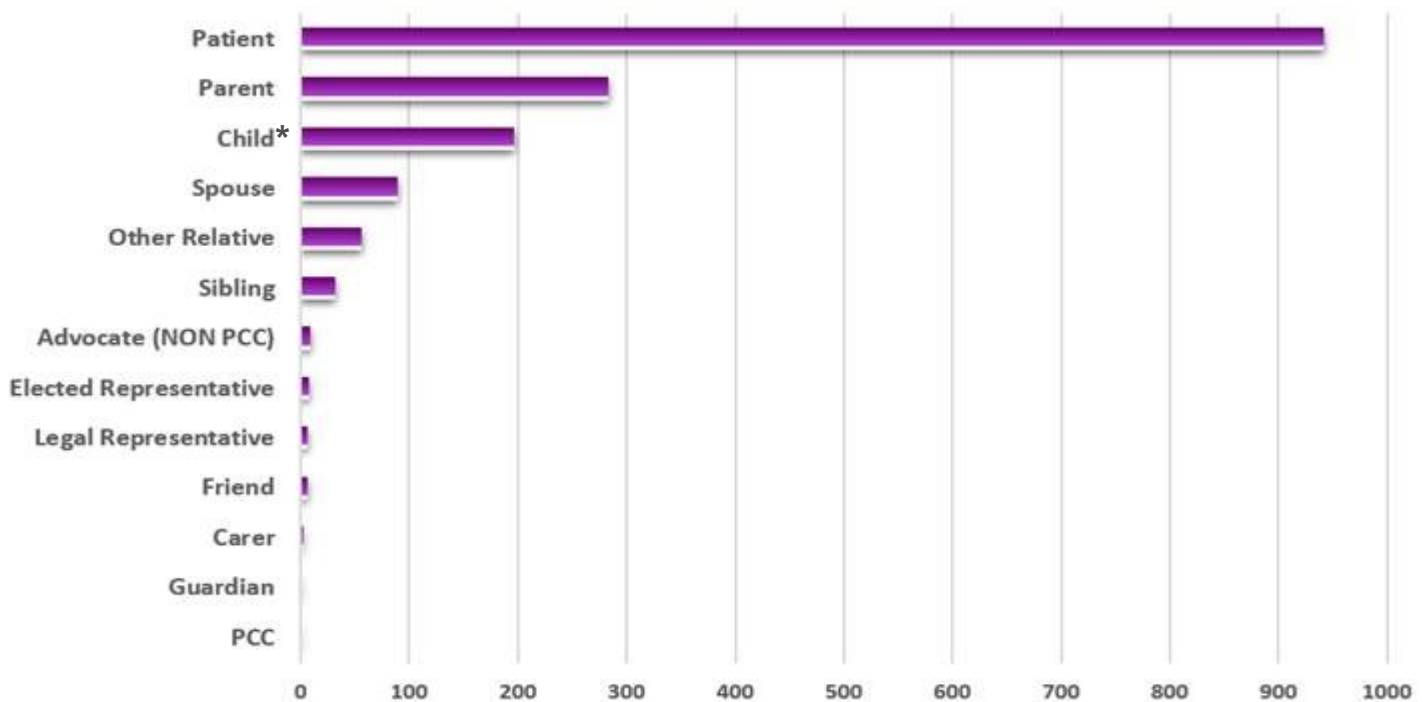
**The service received today was nothing short of exceptional.**



# Who Complains?

In 2022-23, the significant majority of complaints continued to be made by the person directly affected by the complaint issues raised, however concerns can be raised by a variety of people on behalf of others.

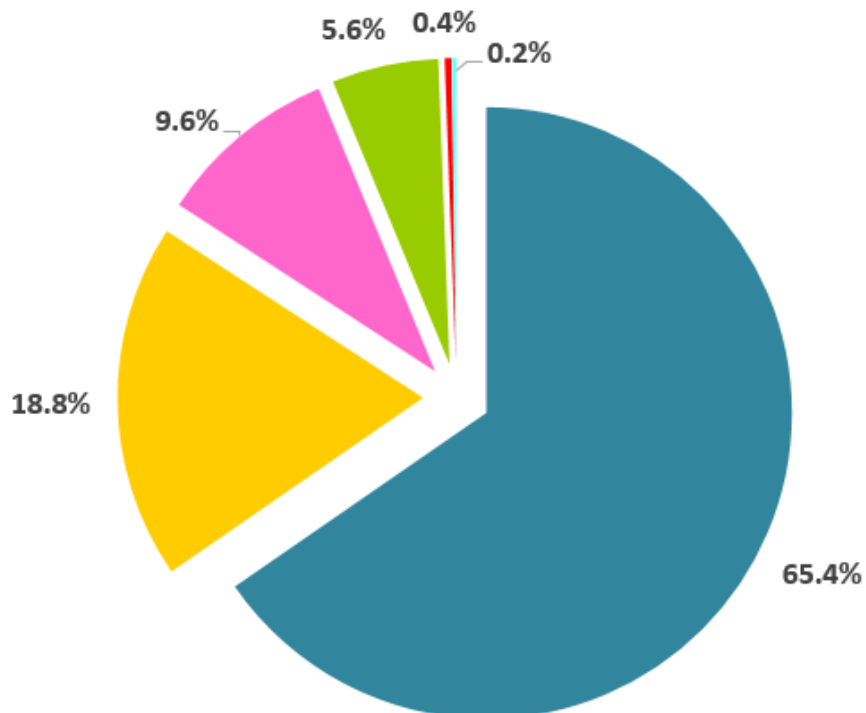
The chart below shows who raised complaints during this time:



\* "Child" relates to complaints raised by adult children on behalf of parents receiving treatment / care

# How are complaints made?

E-mail is the most common way that complaints are brought to the attention of the Trust however we continue to receive complaints in a number of other formats as shown below:



■ Email ■ Telephone ■ Letter ■ Complaints / Feedback Form ■ In person ■ Children Order Leaflet / Card

## How we respond - timeliness of complaint responses 2022-23

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.

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.

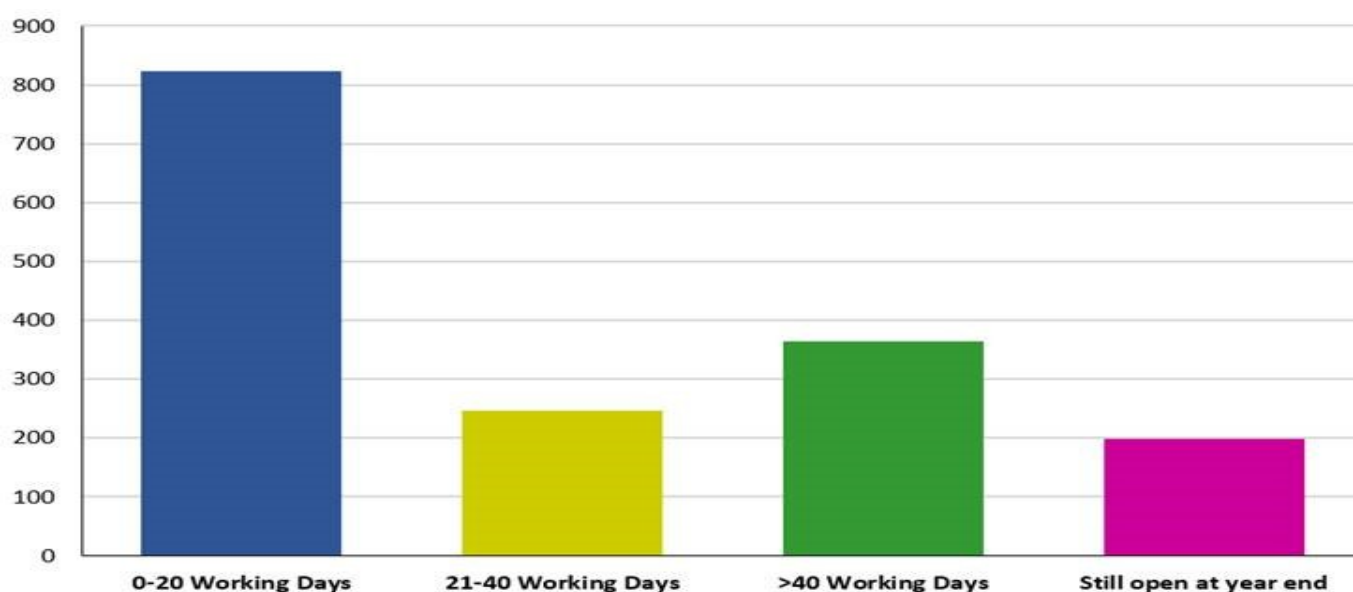
The following table shows the Trust's response times for complaints received and subsequently responded to during 2022/23:

Acknowledgement of complaint within 2 working days	99%
Complaint response within 20 working days	50%
Complaint response within 30 working days	59%

In order to improve the timeliness of our response to complainants, we maintained our focus on long outstanding complaints during 2022/23, in particular continuing to highlight cases where investigations and work to write complaint 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, and we also encouraged and supported staff to resolve complaints on the frontline - increasing the numbers of complaints addressed informally within wards and departments, and also increasing the numbers of formal complaints addressed within 5 working days.

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 2022-23.*

# Learning from Complaints

The Trust seeks to ensure that where any patient has 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 2022/23 include:

*A complaint was received about treatment and care provided to a patient who presented with an eye condition (epiretinal membrane (ERM)).*

*The patient was added to a routine waiting list for surgery however the surgery did not take place until 6 months after the originally scheduled date.*

*The patient reported poor outcomes after the operation, with a loss of central vision and no opportunity for visual improvement.*

*The Trust investigated the patient's care and found that test results obtained during the patient's pre-operative assessment were not reported to the patient's consultant ophthalmologist as there was no defined process in place at that time to ensure that medical staff were alerted when patients had a rapid reduction in visual acuity.*

*The Trust has since introduced a process to communicate pre-operative assessment findings to medical staff to provide them with an up-to-date report on the patient's condition.*

*The investigation identified that if these results had been shared with the consultant, this may have triggered action to expedite the patient's surgery.*

*In response to the complaint investigation the following learning points were identified and implemented by the Trust:*

- Patients presenting with epiretinal membrane who report visual distortion or have a loss of visual acuity should have an eye scan carried out to aid diagnosis and treatment.*
- Unusual aspects in patients with epiretinal membrane (such as young age, characteristics and progression of the condition) should be taken into account when managing patients and planning their care and treatment.*
- The results of patients' visual acuity must be communicated to the consultant ophthalmologist to inform the patient's management plan and expedite surgery if necessary.*
- When patients with epiretinal membrane experience a loss of visual acuity during their period of care, this should be reported as an adverse incident to provide the opportunity to review the patient's care plan and make improvements where necessary.*

## 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.

An example of learning and improvement arising from a complaint that was investigated by the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman in 2022 is detailed below:

A complaint was made regarding care provided to a patient with Down's Syndrome and Dementia in the Belfast City Hospital. A number of concerns were raised by the patient's family, including an assertion that ward staff had inadequate skills to manage the needs of a person with Down's Syndrome and Dementia.

*Significant learning and actions were implemented in response to the outcomes of investigations undertaken both by the Trust and by the Ombudsman into the family's complaints. These included:*

- Recognition of the value and need for specific pain tools for patients with dementia / Learning Disability and that such tools would have added to a cohesive approach to this patient's assessment and care on the ward.

As a result of this learning, the team created a resource folder for staff, focused on supporting patients with learning disability and dementia, who are needing palliative care support.

Resources include:

- ⇒ Easy read leaflets - e.g what is palliative care
- ⇒ Distress and Discomfort Assessment Tool and monitoring sheets
- ⇒ Hospital Communication Book
- ⇒ Web-links to other relevant resources

- A renewed focus on Speech and Language Therapy training for staff, and a review of associated written guidance available across all areas to ensure clarity and standardisation.
- Development of a 24hr advice line for specialist palliative care advice to medical teams.
- Recruitment of an Intellectual Disability Liaison post.
- Engagement with the Learning Disability team to deliver specific training, education and Trust resources on care of patients with learning disability / dementia at the end of life.

## What we will be doing in 2023-24

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 2023/24 to achieve these aims including:

- ⇒ Developing and delivering formal training in Frontline Resolution of Complaints for Service Area staff across the Trust.
- ⇒ Continuing to support Trust wide implementation of enhanced professional assurance processes, including expanded rollout of the Clinical Record Review process for complaints
- ⇒ Working to improve communication with complainants during the investigation of their complaints
- ⇒ Increasing the identification of shared learning from complaints / NIPSO cases by service areas
- ⇒ 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).
- ⇒ Expanding and enhancing Customer Care training for delivery to Trust staff.

In addition we will continue to promote collaborative working on a number of levels to progress improvements in our complaints handling processes:

- ⇒ between Trust Directorates & central Complaints Team, including improvements in the information & data 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) to include working with NIPSO, DoH and SPPG re
  - implementation of INI recommendations / actions
  - development / implementation of Complaints Standards Authority Model Complaints Handling Procedure.

### ***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)