



Patient Advice and Liaison Services

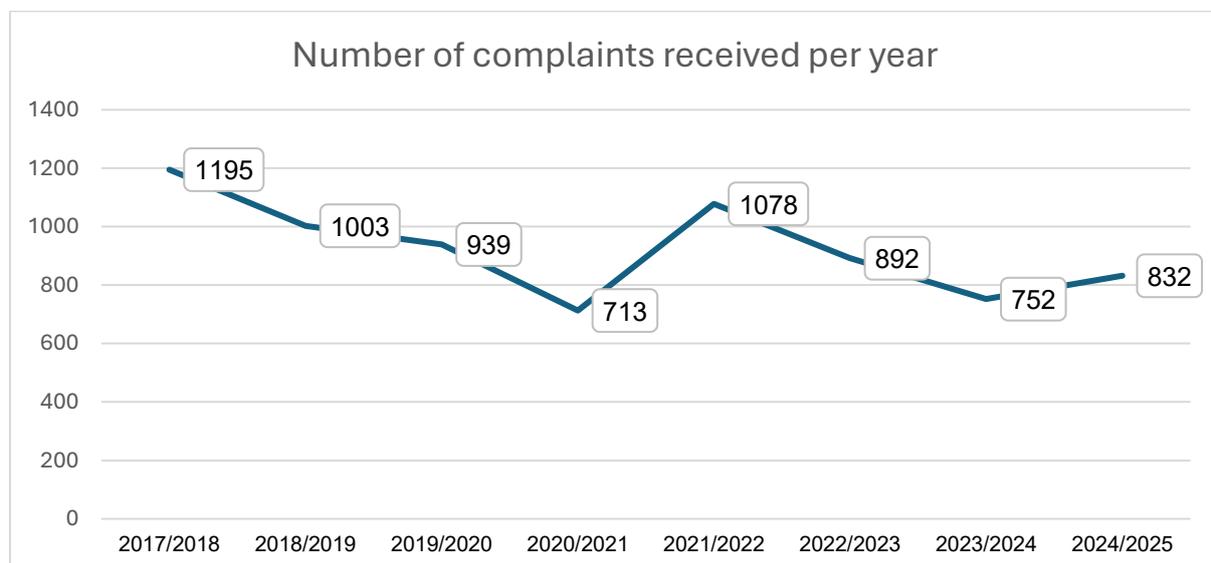
During 2024/2025

- Our Emergency Operations Centre staff answered 1,036,160 calls.
- Our NHS 111 staff took 960,523 calls.
- Our A&E road staff attended 667,343 responses to patients.
- Total number of complaints received 832
- Total number of compliments received 1,980

This represents 1,996,683 interactions with our service users, which equates to one complaint for every 3,383 patient interactions and one compliment for every 1,008 patient interactions.

In 2024/25, the Trust saw a 10.5% increase in complaints since the previous year. On review it has been noted that complaints for field operations have decreased but complaints related to our emergency operations centered have increased by 53% from 187 in 2023 / 2024 to 287 in 2024 /2025. A deep dive into the reason for this increase will be completed during Q1 2025/26 and improvement recommendations are made.

During 2024 / 2025, 92.75% of the complaints received were responded to within the Trust's timescale, of 35 working days for level 2 complaints and 45 working days for level 3 complaints. This fell slightly short of the 95% target and actions have been identified to support improvement for the coming year.



Review and grading of complaints.

Complaints are reviewed by the PALS team and graded according to their seriousness; this ensures they are investigated both appropriately and proportionately. These are:



- **Level 2** – a complaint that appears to be straightforward, with no serious consequences for the patient / complainant, but needs to be sent to a manager of the service area concerned to investigate.
- **Level 3** – a complaint which is serious, having had clinical implications or a physical or distressing impact on the patient / complainant, or to be of a very complex nature.

93.5% of complaints received during 2024 / 2025 were graded as level 2, with the remaining 6.5% as level 3, this is an increase in level 3 complaints of 1.5% over 2023 / 2024 when only 5% of complaints received were graded as level 3. The grades allocated are constantly reviewed during the investigation and can be changed either during or on completion, this may result in the grade being increased from a level 2 to a level 3. Consideration is also given to whether the complaint requires further review under the Patient Safety Incident Response Framework (PSIRF). Complaints can also be downgraded from a level 3 to a level 2, if during or on completion of the investigation the seriousness is not as great as originally thought.

Complaints are categorised into subjects and can be further distinguished by sub-subject if required.

Complaints received during 2023/24 by subject and service area

The highest volume of complaints was seen within the 999, Emergency Operations Centre (287) followed by field operations in the East of SECAMB's geography (225). The most frequent themes were:

- Staff conduct/attitude (225 complaints, 27%) – the single largest category, affecting all directorates, particularly field operations across the organisation.
- Timeliness – A&E (103 complaints) and Pathways (166 total, including 49 where an ambulance was not sent) – indicate operational pressure and potential patient dissatisfaction with triage or dispatch outcomes, particularly within 999 and 111 services.
- Inappropriate treatment (71 complaints) and not transported to hospital (47) – these clinical concerns highlight ongoing issues around care decisions and communication.
- Crew diagnosis (21) and safeguarding/social services referrals (13) – suggest possible gaps in clinical assessment or care escalation.

Complaints were more clinical and patient-care-related in 999 and field operations, whereas 111-related concerns focused on triage accuracy (Pathways) and timeliness.

Less frequent but notable issues include alleged theft (3), breaches of confidentiality (3), and patient injury (6).



Complaints closed

NHS England require an annual report from all NHS Trust's to confirm how many complaints each Trust received were found to be either upheld, partially upheld, or not upheld. The decision on outcome is made by the Investigating Manager based on the findings from their investigation. The PALS Team review the decision on receiving the investigation report and will challenge the Investigating Manager should they feel their decision to be incorrect.

During 2024 / 2025, 421, of the complaints closed (just over 50%) were found to be upheld or partly upheld by the Investigating Manager. If a complaint is received which relates to one specific issue, and substantive evidence is found to support the allegation made, the complaint is recorded as 'upheld'. If a complaint is made regarding more than one issue, and one or more of these issues are upheld, the complaint is recorded as 'partially upheld'.

The complaints which are closed due to consent not being received from the patient to disclose information from their medical records are still investigated and any learning that is identified by the investigating manager is implemented. There were 43 of these in 2024 / 2025 just over 5% of the complaints that were closed.

There are also a small number that are withdrawn by complainants who specifically request an investigation does not take place and ask us to withdraw their complaint, there were 11 such cases, 1.3% in 2024 / 2025.

When the PALS Team recognise that there may have been patient harm complaints are reviewed by the Patient Safety Team, if following review this is deemed to be the case the complaints are closed, and the case taken over by the Patient Safety Team. The complainant is informed by Patient Safety Team of the new timescales for completion of the investigation. There were 10 such cases last year.

The Trust has a robust process for learning from complaints, identifying learning at individual, team and organisational levels, ensuring continuous improvement. One example of Trust wide learning from a complaint in the last year relates to a complaint raised from a patient's daughter where the patient sustained a wound to their leg from a fire extinguisher which was located beneath the seat in the rear of the ambulance. Crew acted appropriately and reported this incident to the operational team leader and raised an incident on the Trust incident system, Datix. Following a full investigation, the Health and Safety Team recommended a change to the location of the fire extinguisher. The Trust Fleet Team are in the process of relocating all fire extinguisher in this model of vehicle to a more suitable location.

Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.

Any complainant who is not satisfied with the outcome of a formal investigation into their complaint may take their concerns to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (Ombudsman) for review. When the Ombudsman's office receives a complaint, they contact the PALS Team to establish whether there is anything further the Trust feels it could do to resolve the issues. If we believe there is, the Ombudsman will pass the complaint back to the Trust for further work. If the Trust believes that local



resolution has been exhausted, the Ombudsman will ask for copies of the complaint file correspondence to review and may investigate.

During 2024 / 2025 there have been 9 cases reviewed by the Ombudsman. Of the 9 cases, 4 are still being reviewed by the Ombudsman, and 2 they have confirmed that no further action is being taken following their review.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) issues:

PALS is a confidential service that offers information or support, and to answer questions or concerns about the services provided by SECamb which do not require a formal investigation. These are entered on our electronic patient safety and risk management software system, Datix, as a Level 1 case. Year on year we see an increase in these PALS requests.

Type / Year	2021 / 2022	2022 / 2023	2023 / 2024	2024 / 2025
HCP concerns*	0	0	14	318
Information Requests	452	466	607	748
Enquiry's	18	39	61	88
Concerns	83	116	122	146
Total	553	621	804	1300

*HCP concerns were handled as incidents by the Datix Team up to March 2024 when they were moved to the PALS Team.

As you will see from the above table the Trust has seen a significant increase in the number of concerns, information requests and enquiries registered over the last four years.

Most PALS requests are for information and include Subject Access Requests under the Data Protection Act, where patients or their relatives require copies of the electronic patient care record (ePCR) completed by our crews when they attended them, or recordings of 999 or NHS111 calls, for a range of reasons. These requests are dealt with in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations.

Other contacts are requests for advice and information regarding what to expect from the ambulance service, people wanting to know how they can provide us with information about their specific conditions to keep on file should they need an ambulance, calls about lost property, and on occasion, families wanting to know about their late relatives' last moments.

Compliments

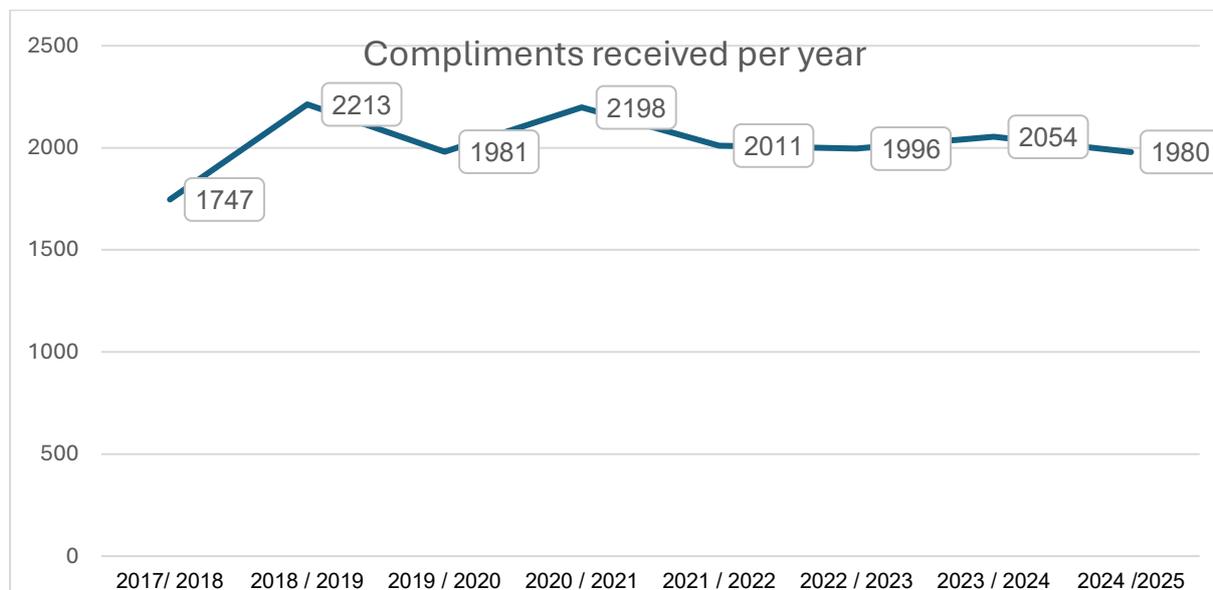
The Trust receives significantly more compliments than complaints (on average, five compliments for every one complaint). Compliments are recorded on our Datix system (electronic patient safety and risk management software system), alongside complaints, so both the positive and negative feedback is captured and reported back to operational staff. The staff concerned receive a letter from the Chief



Executive in recognition of the dedication and care they provide to our patients.

Compliments are shared with crews and their leadership team; staff appreciate being recognised and feel valued when they receive compliments, this validates the good work they are delivering and makes them feel part of a successful team.

The number of compliments that we have received in the last eight years has averaged 2023 per year and remained relatively consistent.



The PALS team continue to ensure that staff receive compliments in a timely manner, the average number of days to process a compliment is five working days.

