



DVA

ANNUAL COMPLAINTS ANALYSIS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2020/21

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# 1. Introduction

Increasingly organisations are recognising the value of a customer complaint, in that it is free feedback about customers' experiences. Complaints can provide a unique insight into how our customers feel about our service, giving us a totally different perspective on how the services we provide and the decisions we make can create difficulties or inconvenience for customers. They are an opportunity to not only resolve a problem for that particular customer but, perhaps, also for a much larger number of customers.

It should be noted however, that due to several factors beyond DVA's control – mainly the availability of MOT appointments and the pandemic – the formal complaints process was suspended from early October 2019 until 3 August 2020. The Covid-19 global pandemic affected lives and society in numerous ways and that included the delivery of public services. Since the impacts of the pandemic started, (around March 2020) circa 15,000 practical driving tests and 750,000 MOTs were cancelled due to the restrictions imposed by the Executive.

It was our priority, and it remains so, to ensure that our staff and customers remained safe and we continue to be guided by the latest public health and scientific advice as we work as quickly as we can to restore our full range of services to our customers. The DVA is very mindful that the cancellation of services is inconvenient, stressful and disappointing for many people, during what was an already difficult and challenging time. However, the DVA had to respond to decisions taken by the Executive and did so as quickly and as fairly as possible. Whilst the DVA had to cancel practical driving tests, the demand for these tests continued to grow, as driver theory tests continued to take place for a period.

The Agency is taking numerous steps to increase its capacity to deliver driving tests, including: offering driving tests for Heavy Goods Vehicles on Sundays, where it is suitable to do so without compromising the integrity of the test; using overtime to rota off-shift dual role driving examiners to provide additional capacity and to provide cover for scheduled driving tests; and the recruitment of additional examiners.

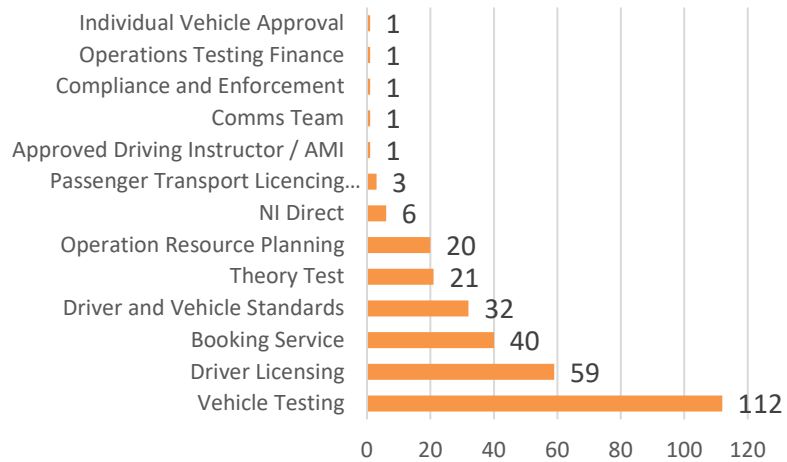
Since vehicle testing was suspended due to Covid-19, eligible vehicles have been issued

with a Temporary Exemption Certificate (TEC), to ensure that they may continue to be driven legally on the road. In some cases TECs have been issued to vehicles from late January 2020, due to the disruption of vehicle testing caused by lift faults.

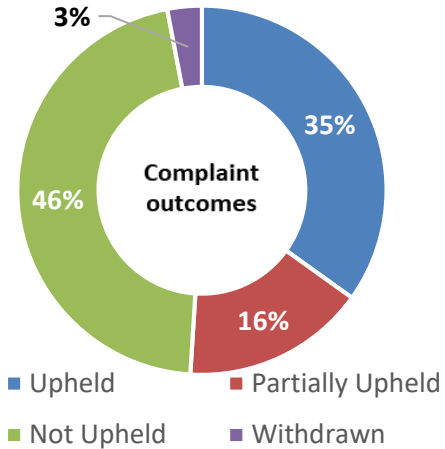
It would have been impossible - and given little value to the customer - to follow the 3 stage process during that time. Even after 3 August there were many complaints dealt with outside of the official procedure due to the volume, however these customers still had access to the Ombudsman if required. The most common types of complaint in this category were the inability to book a driving test and complaints about the priority booking system that was introduced. A standard response or Lines to Take for these queries were introduced and used. This will be discussed later in the report.

## 2.0 Complaint Dashboard

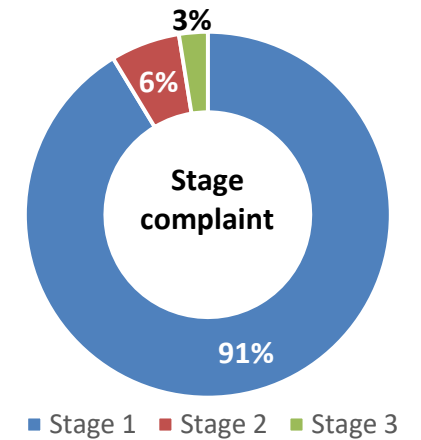
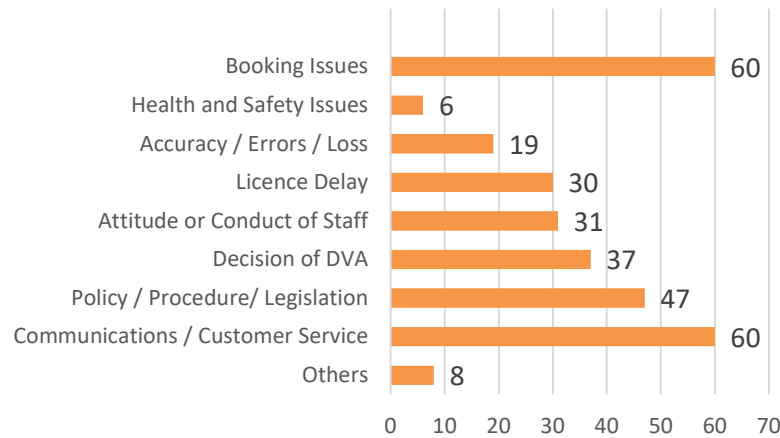
Complaints received by business area



98.7% of complaints responded to on time  
**TARGET ACHIEVED**



By reason



### 3. Executive Summary

This report provides statistical information on the number of complaints we received, our performance in handling those in terms of timeliness, and also our effectiveness in resolving complaints at the various stages.

During this reporting year (April 2020 to March 2021) we received, and dealt with, a total of **298 formal** complaints. This figure represents a decrease of 36.9% on the previous year (473 complaints received 2019-2020). However it should be noted that realistically the figure above only covers the period from August 2020, because the DVA Complaints process was suspended until August 2020 and the complaints procedure itself amended due to a “perfect storm” of issues that severely impacted on the DVA’s ability to deliver its services.

In March 2020 the Covid Pandemic reached Northern Ireland and lockdown was introduced. This was on the back of MOT tests already being cancelled from January 2020 because of the issues surrounding the cracked lifts. As a result there was a massive influx of complaints regarding the shutdown of driving tests and vehicle tests as well as the process used to determine priority when we were allowed to begin testing again. DVA are still feeling the effects of these issues over a year later.

DVA Customer Services dealt with a massive 3000% (30 fold) increase in customer contacts and queries during the first 6 months from April 2020, due to the suspension of vehicle and driver testing services. Many of these queries were “complaints” which would have normally been dealt with under the normal complaints process. However, in order to handle the thousands of queries we received, we dealt with these as normal business. Had we used the normal process for defining complaints, we would certainly have registered over 1,000 complaints during the year.

In these cases we developed and used standard lines to take and standard responses to keep customers updated. However, in cases where the same customer remained dissatisfied regarding their situation after repeated responses, these were then redefined as formal complaints and escalated to the complaint process.

The complaint process, when relating to Driver and Vehicle tests, was also amended to consist of

only 1 stage rather than 3. Normally, when customers express dissatisfaction with our service, these are treated as formal complaints and dealt with by the formal procedure. However, given the volume of queries / complaints and the fact that these are in relation to a situation that affected many people in the same way, we saw no value in treating these as individual, formal complaints, within our 3-stage framework. In essence, we were unable to change or improve the citizen's position in relation to driving test availability and so further investigation (as in further 'stages') seemed to us to have little value. This new arrangement was introduced following consultation with the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman (NIPSO).

In addition, based on NIPSO information, we have stopped recording "informal complaints" as this implies these are not taken seriously. They have been treated as Line of Business queries.

In 2020-21 we also received 15 compliments, whereas in 2019/20 year we received 91 compliments from customers. Given the significant reduction in the delivery of our services, this is not surprising.

In 2020-21, we conducted the following customer transactions –

- 252,000 Vehicle Tests (down 75% on previous year)
- 30,000 Theory Tests (down 56% on previous year)
- 9,500 Driving Tests (down 83% on previous year) – 23,200 applications
- 182,000 Licensing Transactions (down 30% on previous year)

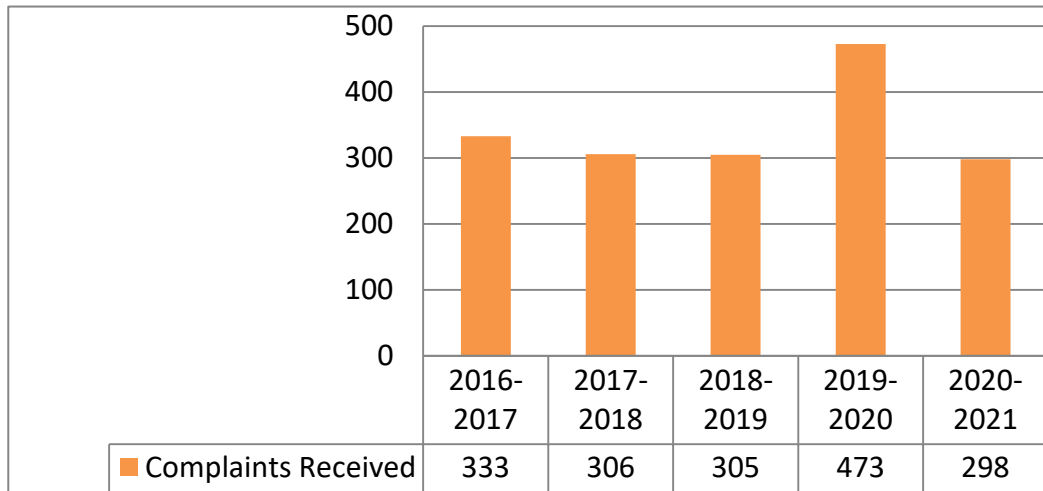
The proportion of formal complaints against the group transactions is given below.

- 1 complaint per 2,250 Vehicle Tests
- 1 complaint per 1,429 Theory Tests
- 1 complaint per 297 Driving Tests or 1 complaint per 725 applications
- 1 complaint per 3085 Licensing Transactions

Overall we had 298 complaints out of 1,221,323 transactions which resulted in a ratio of 1 complaint per 4,098 transactions (as previously mentioned care should be taken when using this figure in isolation as it reflects the circumstances of a very unusual period).

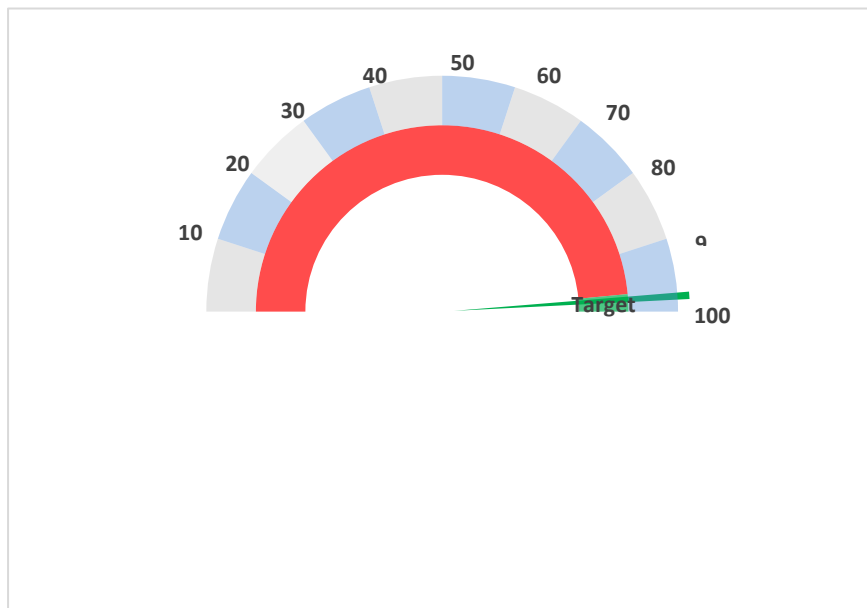
## 4.0 Complaints Infographics

### 4.1 Total Complaints Year on Year



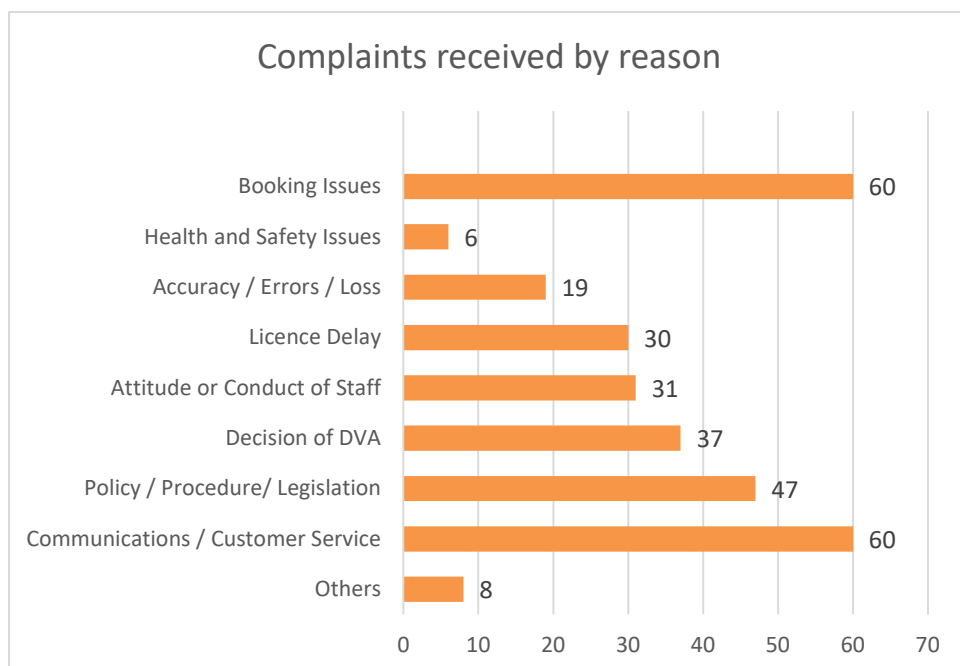
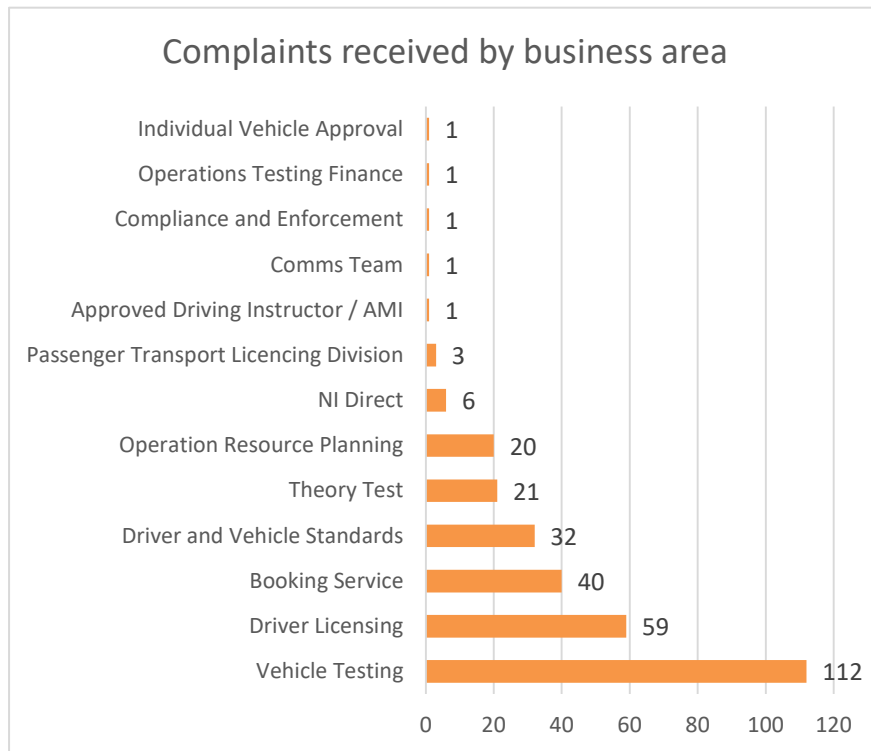
### 4.2 Performance against Target

Even with the significant increase in correspondence, the target of 97% of complaints answered within 10 working days was met (98.7 %). The Customer Services team played a critical role in meeting this target, by continuously monitoring target dates and encouraging timely returns from business areas, who have responded very well in difficult circumstances.



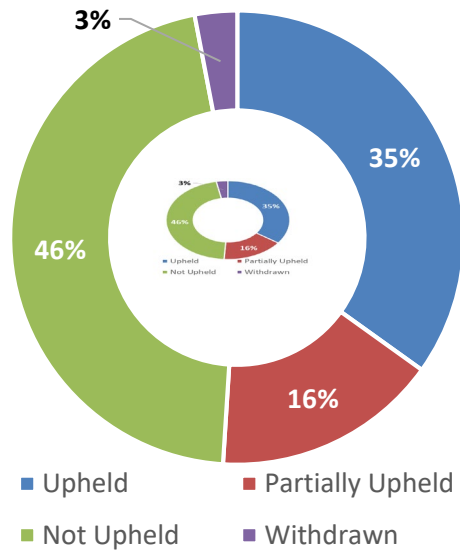


### 4.3 Complaints Received Breakdown

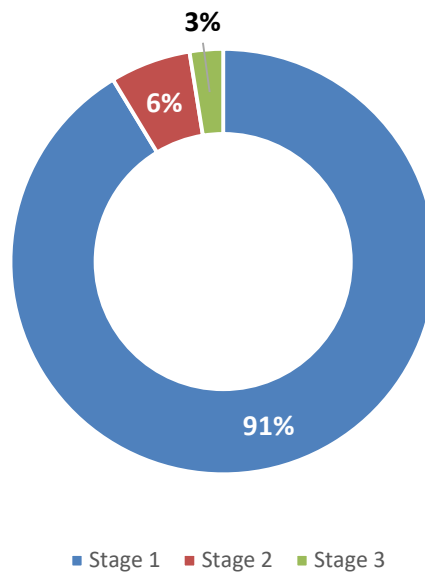


## 4.4 Complaints Outcomes

Overall Outcome of Complaints Received



Stage at Which Complaint Completed



## **4.5 Complaints Outcomes Analysis**

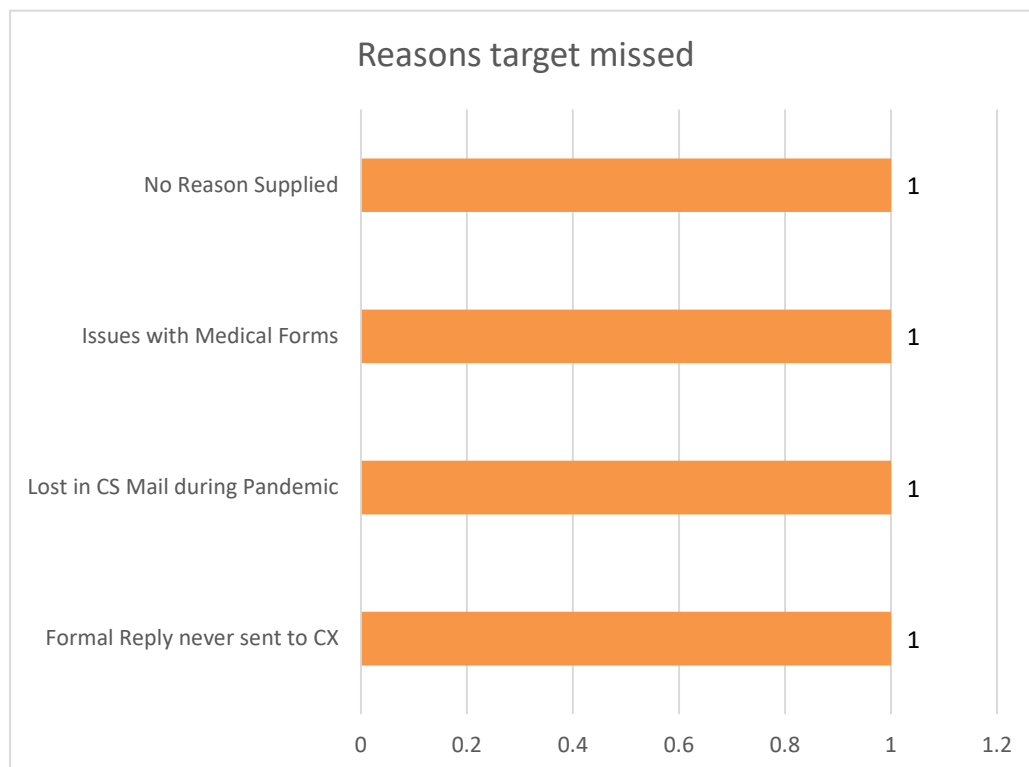
As illustrated in the complaints outcomes charts, over 50% of complaints received have either been “upheld” or “partially upheld”. Although down on last year (68%) this is still a very high percentage of complaints in which the DVA were at fault to some degree. Again it is quite likely that this figure would have been much higher if we had not suspended the normal complaints procedure.

It is pleasing to note that the number of complaints that missed target has fallen from 12 in 2019-20 to 4 in 2020-21, a 66% decrease. However it is important not to get complacent as it should be noted that there was a big decrease in the number of complaints and therefore this figure should be used cautiously. In reality using direct comparison of targets it is a less than 2% decrease in real terms.

Regrettably, in some processes DVA are dependent on third parties and are therefore limited in the influence we can bring to the service delivery, e.g. the granting of medical licenses. Ultimately the DVA is responsible, so these complaints were upheld.

## 4.6 Complaints that Missed Target

A total of 4 complaints failed to meet the target for issuing a response within 10 working days.



## 5.0 Lessons Learned

Just like last year, a valuable lesson learned this past year has been the need for the complaints system and its administrators to be flexible. A significant challenge is the ownership of complaints when it comes to responses. It is important that there is a clear demarcation of roles as there has been confusion as to the ownership of complaints in the past. DVA has taken steps to clarify this issue.

It is important that procedures for handling complaints is always correctly and fully followed by all staff, including those who have responsibility for handling complaints. Significant support is available to staff, including procedures, pro formas and templates explaining what needs to be done and providing the correct wording etc. Customer Services has been requested to, and is in the process of producing a “desk aid” containing links to all relevant procedures and pro formas that will be distributed to Grade 7s to be considered by the Business Improvement Group.

As stated in the introduction to this document, and more recently in a seminar attended by the Customer Services Manager and Head of Customers Services & Communications, complaints give us an opportunity to determine what we can do to improve. We should always be looking to improve as a result of complaints received. It is important that complaints are not regarded as an “add on” or as a back office function that can ‘get in the way’ of the core organisational work- unfortunately some customers who have contacted us feel this way. It can be seen in these Annual Complaints Analysis reports when you compare them year on year.

Due to the nature of some aspects of the Agencies work, as well as the high volumes of transactions and interactions, there will always be a certain number of complaints around certain issues - attitude of staff, the processes which do not work, errors in printing etc., no matter how much we do.

However we should strive to improve on these areas to make the customer experience more positive and more consistent. Until this happens we are limited on how we can improve as an organisation. Continued Senior Management support in all areas is vital.

## 6.0 The Way Forward

An internal review by Customer Services staff, in conjunction with the Department, took place in 2019 and concluded that having a three stage complaints procedure is very resource intensive and inefficient. It is often the case that the complainant does not add any further evidence to support the next stage of the complaint, but merely repeat their complaint or say they disagree with the previous stage. Complaints handlers therefore often find it difficult to do anything other than reissue the same or a very similar wording to the customer, as their findings often do not change from the previous stage of the investigation.

Good practice is recognised as having “as few stages as possible” and for this reason, and to align with the Department, we will adopt a two Stage complaints process beginning in April 2022. (We had intended to have this in place for April 2021 but several factors worked against us). The plan is to bring this live in April 2022 in line with the potential new Complaints Handling Software, as we have now entered the last year of the contract with our current provider, Aptean.

We have also amended our complaints process to redefine what is and is not a complaint. If other procedures or rights of appeal are in place to help resolve the customer’s concern we will provide that information, instead of treating the issue as a complaint. This will enable DVA complaint handlers to be better positioned in dealing with complaints whilst still giving the customer assurances that they have a means of appeal.

The introduction of a new 2-stage procedure will also include a new set of procedures and a programme of training or education for all staff involved in complaint handling.

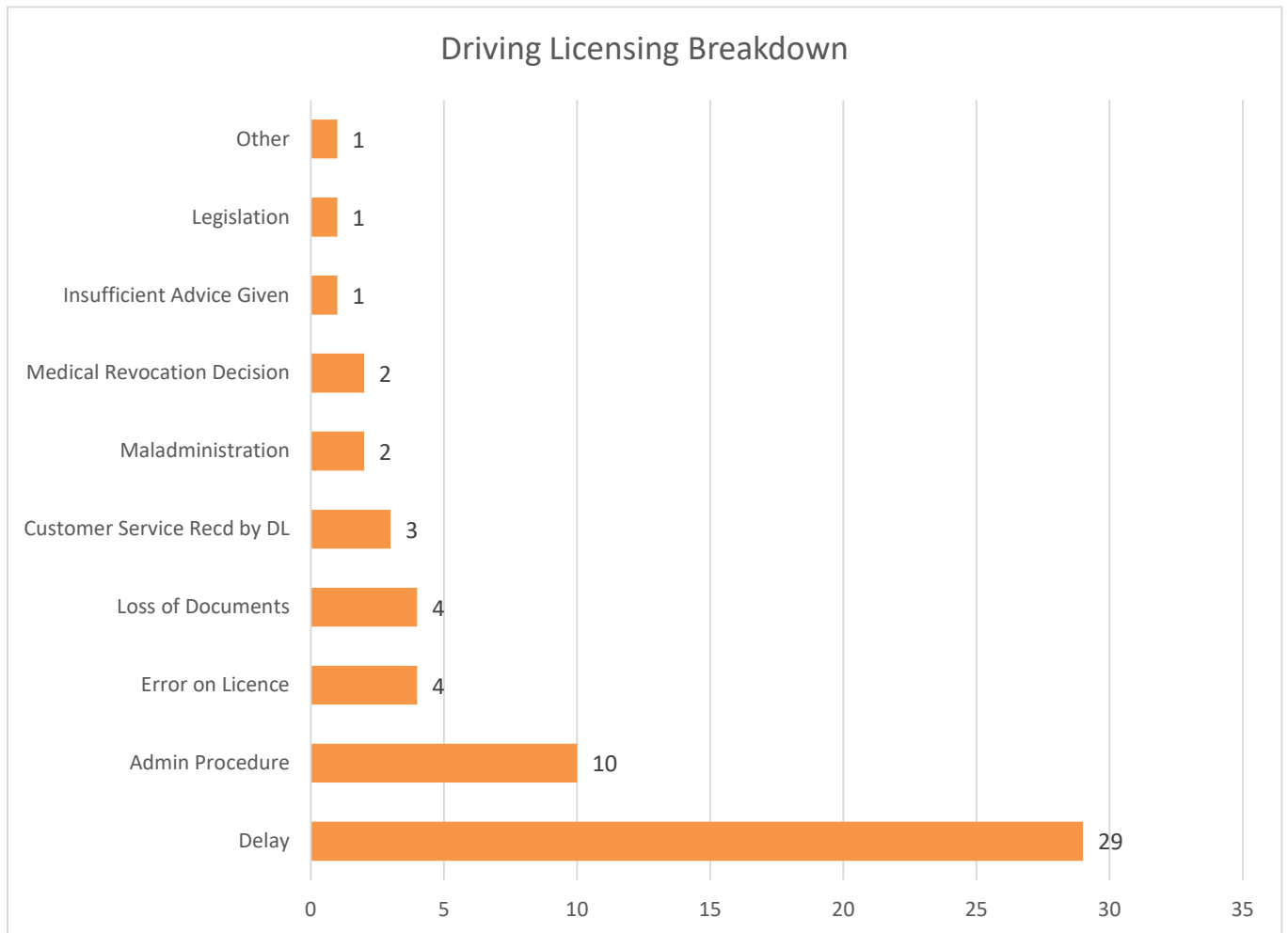
The new arrangements, once introduced, will take some time to embed, and it is important that our senior management continue to show their support for the importance of complaint handling. As stated in Principles of Good Complaint Handling – “good complaint handling requires strong and effective leadership. Those at the top of the public body should take the lead in ensuring good complaint handling, with regard to both the practice and the culture”

## Appendix 1. At a Glance Guide for Test Centres

Test Centre	Tests conducted <sup>3</sup>	Formal Complaints	LOB Queries	Compliments received	Upheld Incidents of vehicle damage	Compensation Payments
Armagh	14,352	4	6	2	0	0
Ballymena	18,421	11	0	0	1	54.00
Belfast	24,791	9	1	0	1	1609.20
Coleraine	15,221	3	0	0	0	0
Cookstown	15,876	7	0	2	2 (1 carried into next year)	565.08 (50.27 carried into next year)
Craigavon	20,675	9	0	0	0	0
Downpatrick	10,145	7	1	0	1	1105.33
Enniskillen	12,029	2	1	0	0	0
Larne	10,157	2	1	1	0	0
Lisburn	19,219	5	0	0	0	0
Londonderry	21,342	22	4	0	1	821.89
Mallusk	23,625	10	3	0	1	1152.50
Newry	15,547	3	1	0	1	2391.76
Newtownards	28,699	11	2	1	1	138.00
Omagh	11,260	7	2	0	2	1736.46
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>261,359</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9,574.22</b>

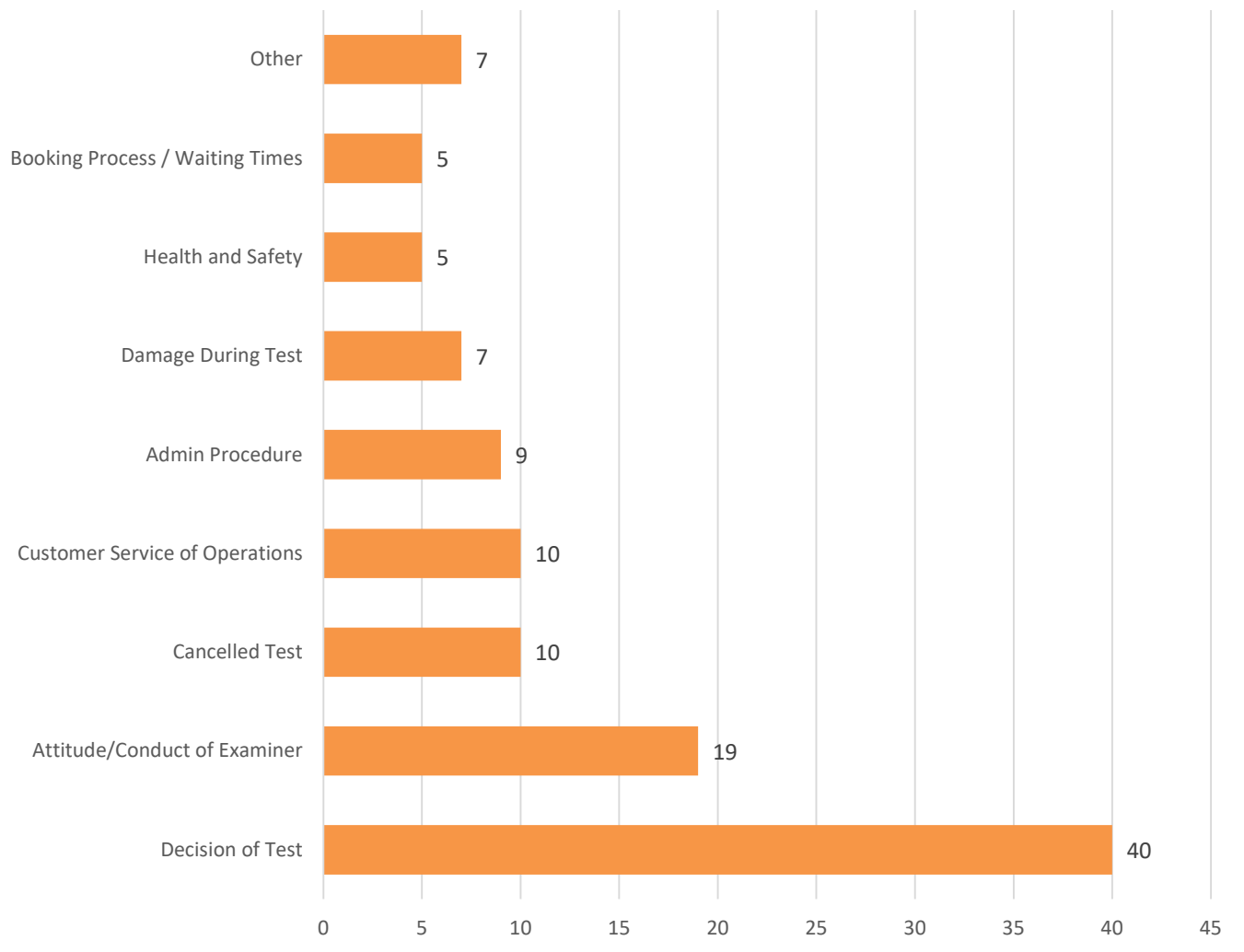
<sup>3</sup> Vehicle and driving tests conducted

## Appendix 2. Breakdown of complaints by Business Area

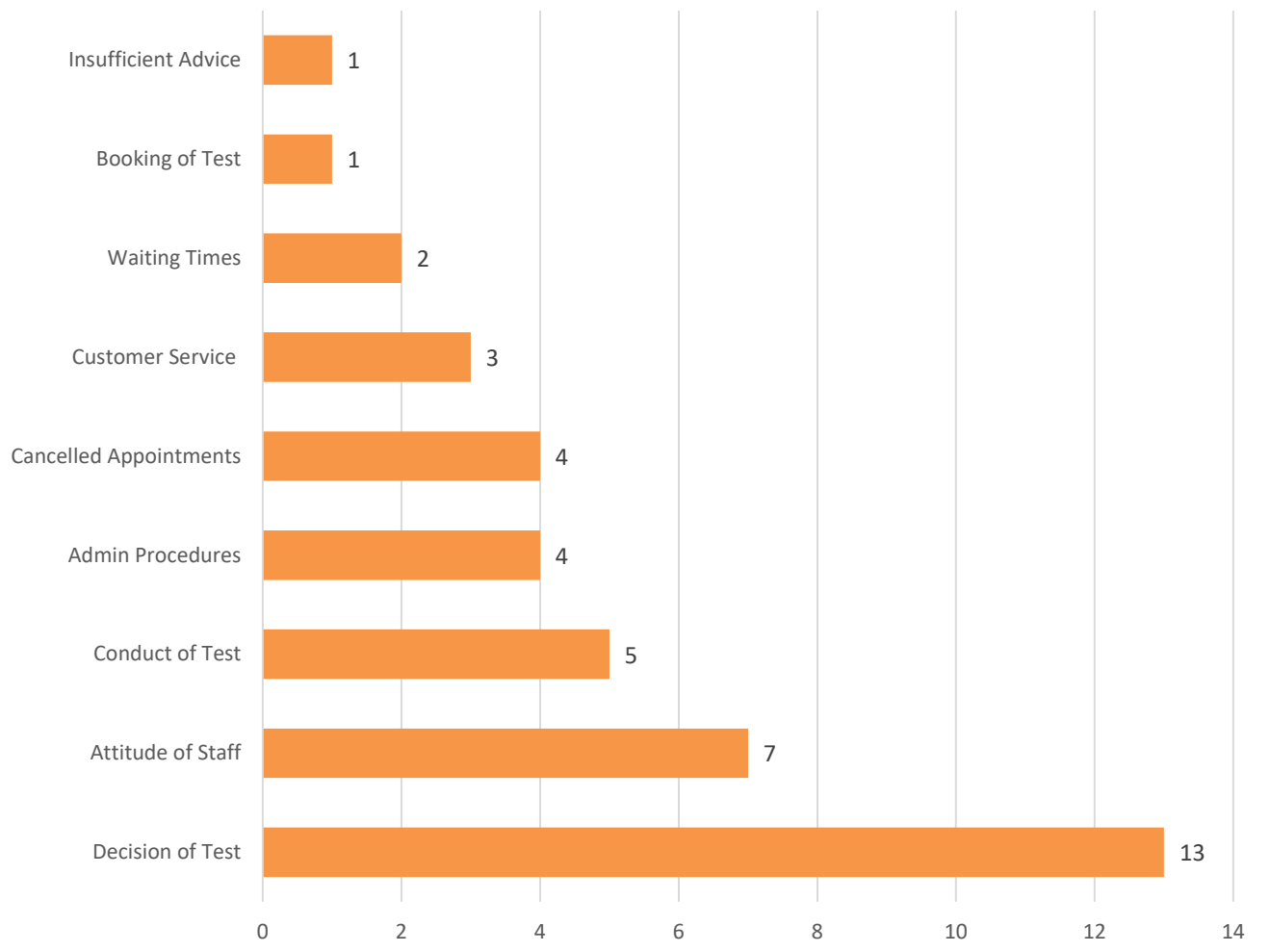




### Vehicle Testing Breakdown



### Driving Test Breakdown



### Customer Care Breakdown

