



An Agency within the Department for

Infrastructure

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Infrastructure

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DVA Annual Complaints Report

2022-23



 **Driver & Vehicle Agency**

Safer Drivers, Safer Vehicles

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Abbreviations

DVA = Driver and Vehicle Agency

PTLD = Passenger and Transport Licensing Division

Ops = Operations Directorate

Comms = Communications Team

Proc = Procurement

1.0 Introduction

This report details complaints received by the Agency for the period April 2022 to March 2023. It provides an analysis on the reasons for the complaints and outlines areas for improvement in the processing of complaints by the Agency.

Complaints supply a unique insight into how customers feel about our service, giving us a different perspective on how the services we provide and the decisions we make can create difficulties or inconvenience for customers. They are crucial in showing areas or processes that are not working for customers and are an opportunity to resolve problems. Valuable lessons are learnt from the feedback we receive from customers, and we use the information supplied to continually improve our services.

In April 2022 the Agency moved from a 3-stage complaints process to a 2-stage process. This was endorsed by the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman (NIPSO) when they stated that the 2-stage process “...*may be beneficial to DVA and Customers as it allows for a shorter, more streamlined approach to responding to complaints*”.

The time limits for the handling of complaints have also been amended. Previously the three-stage complaints process had a time limit of 10 working days at each stage in which to respond - this gave a total of thirty working days to pass through the complaints process. The new two-stage process has a time limit of 15 working days for Stage 1 and 10 working days for Stage 2, thus shortening the time taken to exhaust the complaint process which meets the criteria mentioned in the feedback from NIPSO.

As part of the new process around complaints, the Agency also invested in a new complaint handling database called iCasework. This database has enhanced the Agency’s ability to deal with the administrative side of complaints more efficiently and drill down to a level of reporting that was not previously possible.

2.0 Summary Complaints Dashboard: April 2022 – March 2023

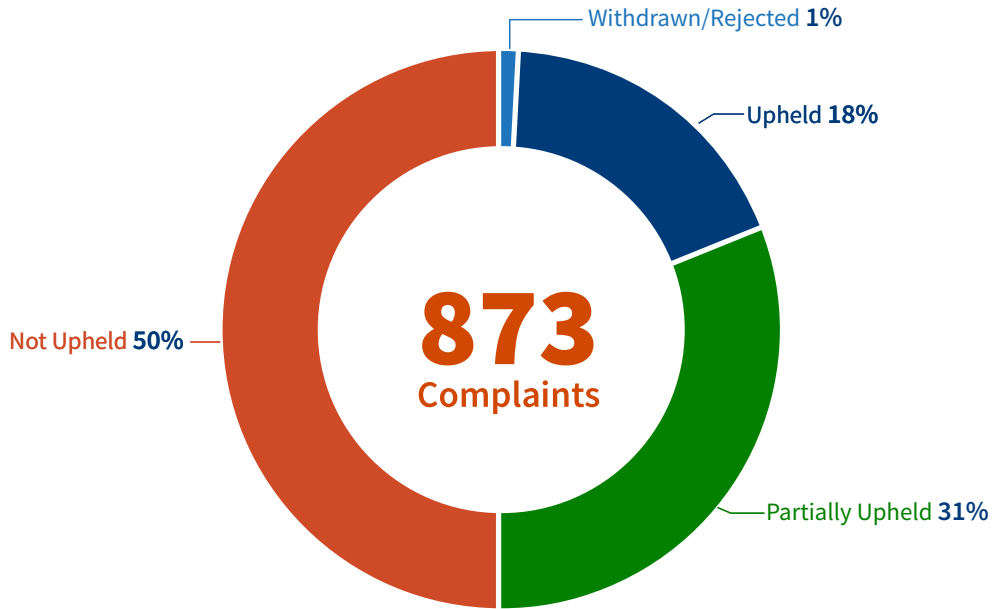
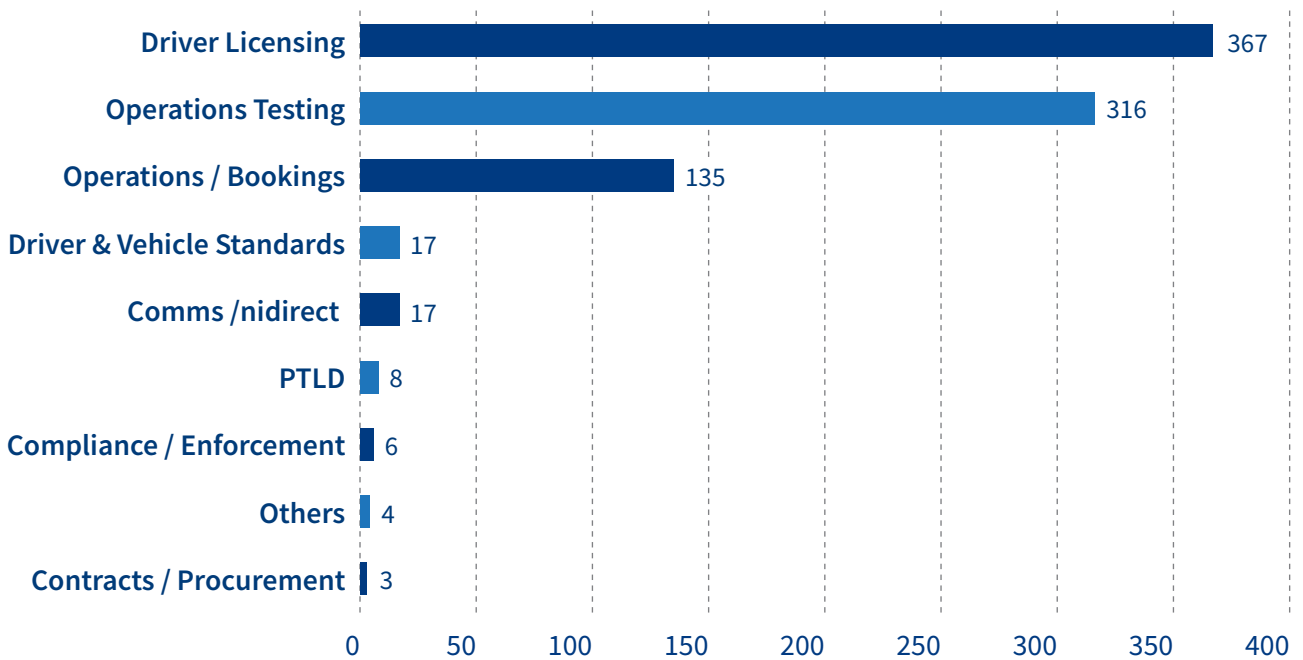


Business
Plan Target
97%

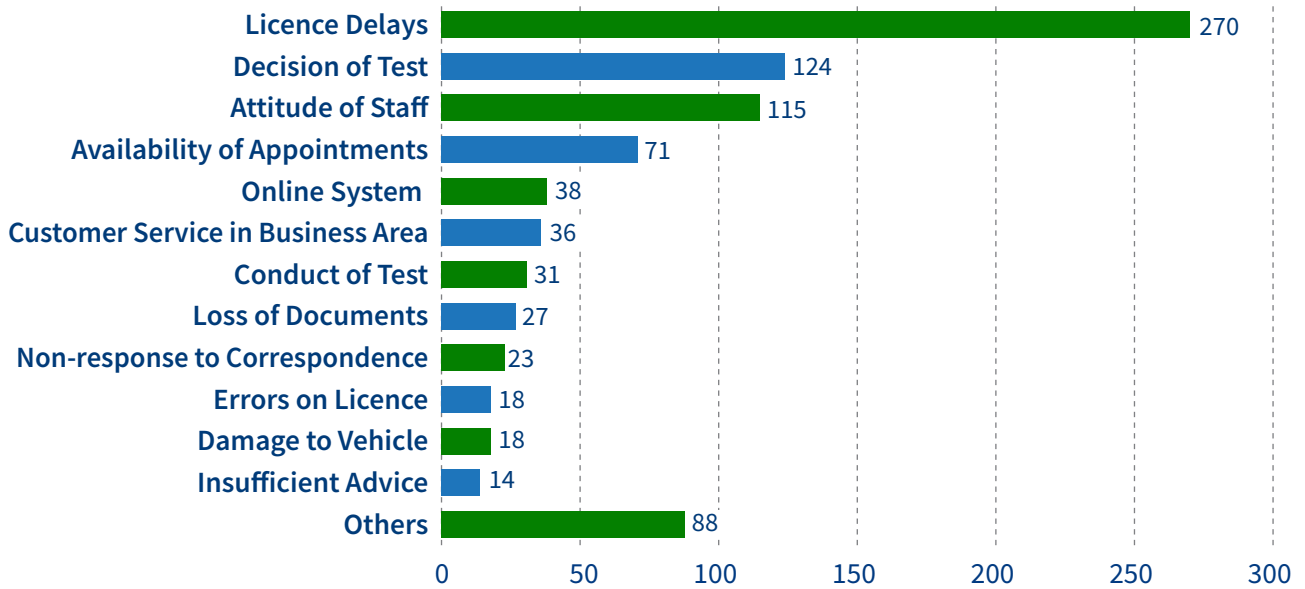
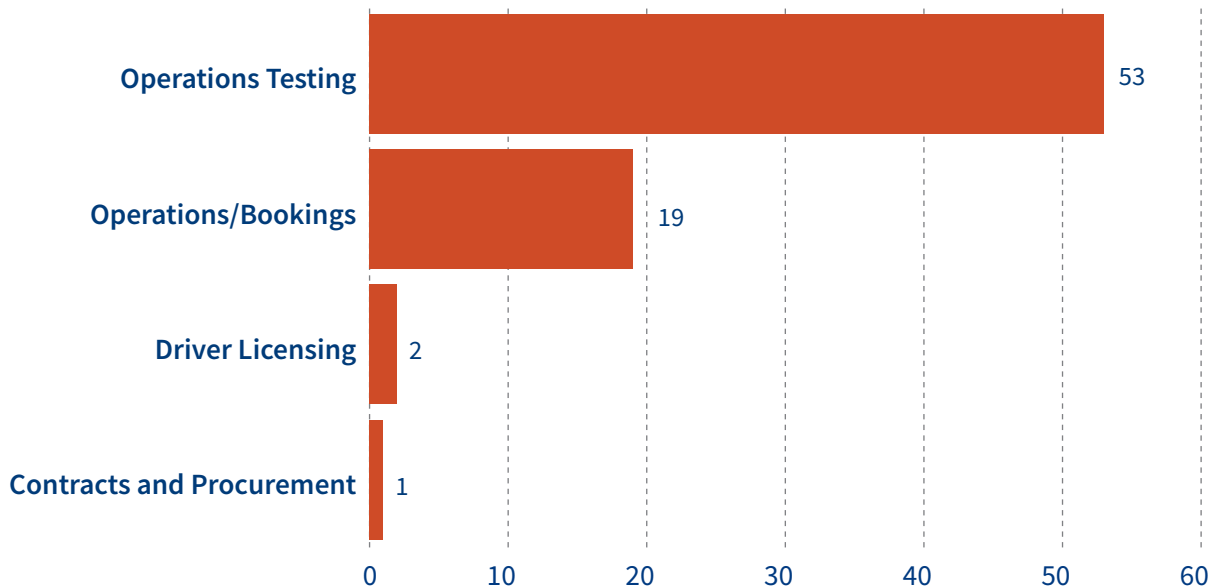
Percentages of complaints responded to within the target timeframes:

STAGE 1: 91.7%

STAGE 2: 98.6%

Figure 1: Complaints outcome**Figure 2: Complaints by Business Area**

*PTLD - Passenger and Transport Licensing Division

Figure 3: Complaints by Reason**Figure 4: Complaint Target Missed by Business Area**

3.0 Executive Summary

During the year Customer Services received 82,436 correspondence queries, a decrease of 16.5% from the previous year's queries (98,783). 36% of these queries were answered at the first point of contact, with the rest being re-directed to the relevant business area for a more detailed explanation. The Agency also received 8,916 requests regarding MOT histories (5,714 in the previous year). In December 2022, an online system was introduced that allows the customer to obtain the MOT history of a vehicle directly; this has led to a significant reduction in these queries.

During this reporting year the Agency dealt with a total of 873 complaints. This figure is slightly down from that of the previous year (904 complaints received in 2021-2022). In 2022-23 we received 40 compliments from customers, compared with 41 in 2021-22. These were thanking staff for their good service, with the greatest number of compliments related to obtaining a short notice appointment.

91.7% of Stage 1 complaints and 98.6% of Stage 2 complaints were responded to on time against targets of 97% for each stage.

In 2022-23, the Agency conducted the following customer transactions –

- 992,400 Full Vehicle Tests
- 87,230 Theory Tests
- 68,540 Driving Tests
- 341,457 Licensing Transactions.

The proportion of complaints for each service area compared with the total number of transactions is given below.

- 1 complaint for every 5,100 Full Vehicle Tests conducted;
- 1 complaint for every 17,446 Theory Tests conducted;
- 1 complaint for every 530 Driving Tests conducted;
- 1 complaint for every 945 Licensing Transactions

Overall the Agency had 873 complaints in 1,489,627 transactions, which resulted in a ratio of 1 complaint to every 1,706 transactions. This is compared with 1 complaint to every 1,467 transactions in 2021-22, an improvement in the ratio of complaints to transactions.

Section 4 provides more detail on individual areas.

4.0 Complaints Infographics

4.1 Total Complaints Year on Year

Figure 5: Total Complaints Year on Year

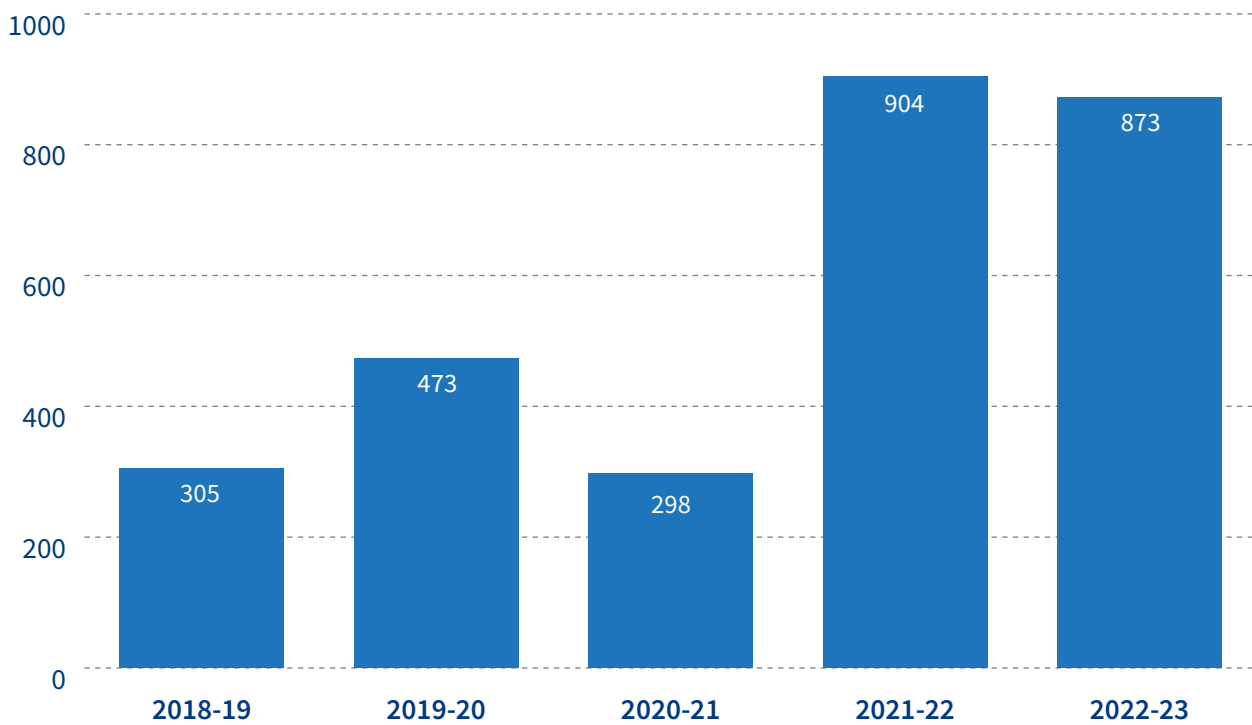


Figure 5: Total Complaints Year on Year

Year	Number of Complaints
2018-19	305
2019-20	473
2020-21	298
2021-22	904
2022-23	873

4.2 Performance against Target

The Agency constantly monitors target dates, but still fell short of the target of 97% of complaints responded to within timescales over the course of the year. Most late complaints were at Stage 1 in the process - 91.7% of Stage 1 complaints met the target and 98.6% of Stage 2 complaints met target.

In an effort to improve the response times for complaints Customer Services branch held a complaint handling seminar with Heads of Business and Complaints Managers in October 2022, highlighting the importance of meeting complaints targets. Following the seminar response times improved significantly, however this was not enough to meet the overall annual target of 97% for each stage.

4.3 Complaints Received Breakdown

Figure 6: Total Complaints by Business Area

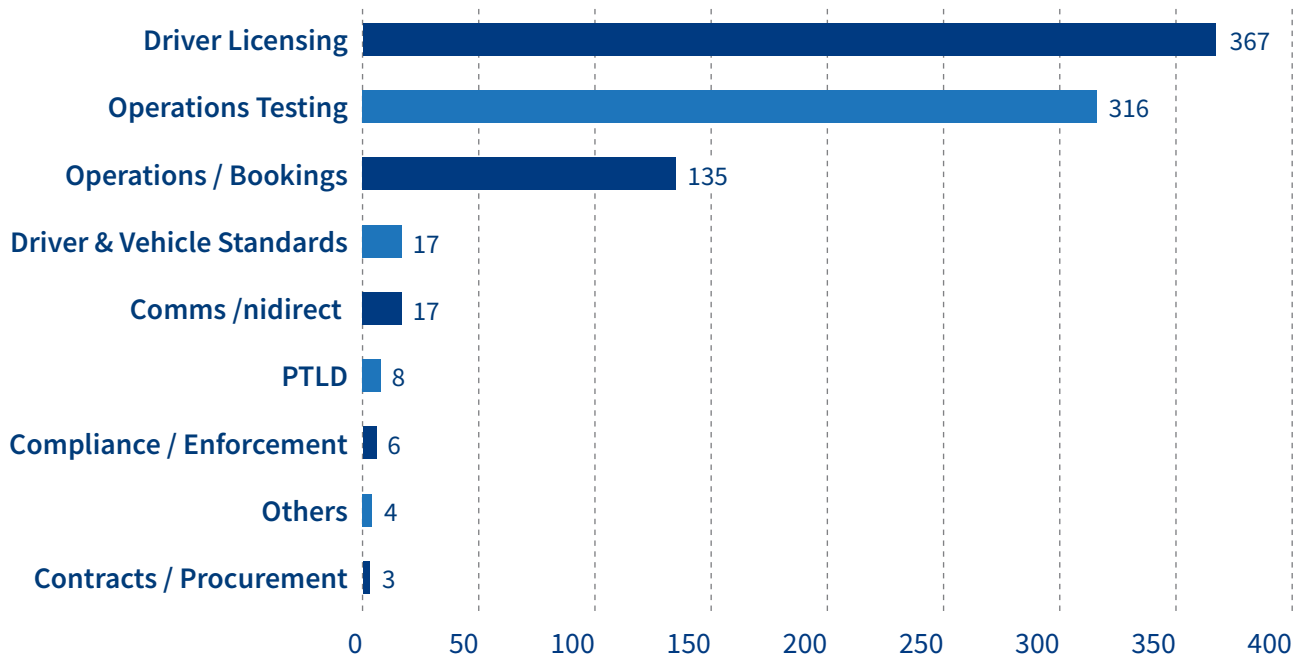
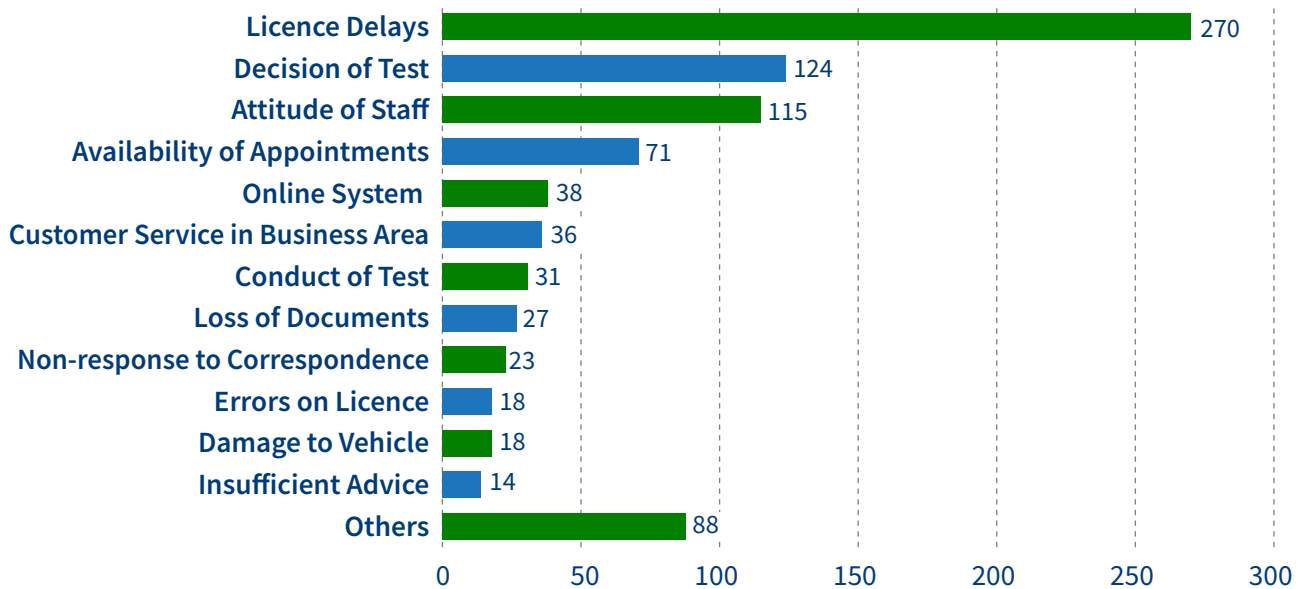


Figure 6: Total Complaints by Business Area

Business Area	Overall
Driver Licensing	367
Operations Testing	316
Operations / Bookings	135
Driver & Vehicle Standards	17
Comms /nidirect	17
PTLD	8
Compliance / Enforcement	6
Others	4
Contracts / Procurement	3
TOTALS	873

*PTLD - Passenger and Transport Licensing Division

Figure 7: Complaints by Reason**Figure 7: Complaints by Reason**

Rank	Reasons	Total number of Complaints
1	Licence Delays	270
2	Decision of Test	124
3	Attitude of Staff	115
4	Others	88
5	Availability of Appointments	71
6	Online System	38
7	Customer Service in Business Area	36
8	Conduct of Test	31
9	Loss of Documents	27
10	Non-Response to Correspondence	23
11	Errors on Licence	18
12	Damage to Vehicle	18
13	Insufficient Advice	14

Section 75 Complaints

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act places a statutory obligation on Public Authorities to carry out their functions with due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and good relations in respect of religious beliefs, political opinion, gender, race, disability, age, marital status, dependants, and sexual orientation. During the year we received 5 complaints claiming the Agency did not comply with the section 75 characteristics.

Of the five complaints, 1 related to gender (Vehicle Testing) and 4 to disability (3 in Driver Licensing and 1 regarding Driving Test). Of the five complaints the following outcomes were recorded – 1 withdrawn, 1 Not Upheld and 3 Partially Upheld.

4.4 Complaints Outcomes

Figure 8: Overall Outcome of Complaints Received

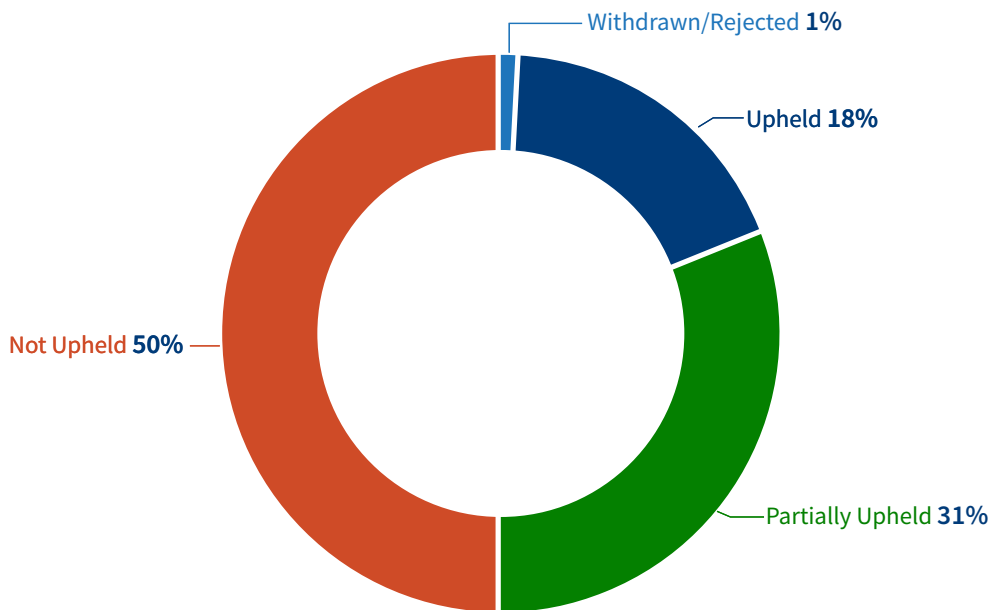


Figure 8: Overall Outcome of Complaints Received

Outcome	Overall
Upheld	155 (18%)
Partially Upheld	274 (31%)
Not Upheld	434 (50%)
Withdrawn	8 (0.9%)
Rejected	1 (0.05%)
Resolved at First Point of Contact	1 (0.05%)
TOTALS	873

4.5 Complaints Outcomes Analysis

As illustrated in the complaints' outcomes chart, 49% of complaints received have been either "upheld" or "partially upheld". In almost half of complaints the Agency was at fault to some degree; this is a significant increase on last year (37% in 2021-22).

It is important to note that in some processes the Agency is dependent on third parties and is therefore limited in the influence it can bring to the service delivery (e.g., the granting of driver licences where external medical advice is required). However, the Agency remains responsible, therefore these complaints were fully/partially upheld.

4.6 Complaints that Missed Target

The number of complaints that missed target increased from 31 in 2021-22 to 75 in 2022-23. As noted above, staff training was provided during the year to emphasise the importance of responding to complaints on time, following which targets improved.

Figure 9: Complaint Target Missed by Business Area

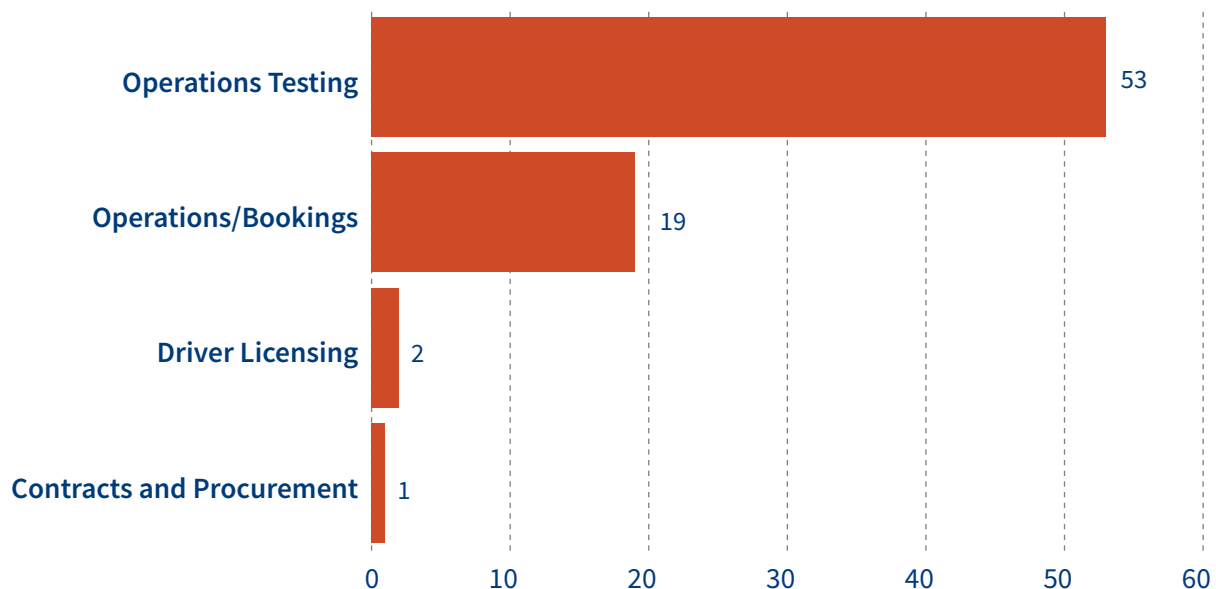


Figure 9: Complaint Target Missed by Business Area

Business Area	Number
Operations Testing	53
Operations / Bookings	19
Driver Licensing	2
Contracts and Procurement	1
TOTAL	75

5.0 Issues and Lessons Learned

This section of the report discusses the likely reasons for the 2022-23 complaints performance, considers lessons learned and proposes improvements.

The top reason (almost a third of the total) for complaints this year related to the delays in obtaining a licence (Table 1a at Appendix 1 provides a breakdown of the reasons for Driver Licensing complaints). Many of these complaints related to licences where medical information was required, at a time when the NICS Occupational Health Service (OHS) withdrew its medical assessment services. It is hoped that the recent contract which the Agency has entered into with an external medical assessment provider will improve the turnaround of licences where medical assessment is required and reduce the number of complaints.

The next highest reason for complaints received was the decision of the test (both MOT and driving test). This is always a contentious topic, especially relating to driving tests and it is likely that the Agency will always receive complaints of this nature.

The third highest reason for complaints was the poor attitude of staff (approximately 15% of the total) and features as a reason for complaint across all business areas. The Agency expects high standards from its staff when dealing with customers, and staff working with the public are regularly reminded of the need to deal appropriately with customers - which sometimes can be in the face of difficult customer behaviour.

The availability of appointments continues to be an issue, this is reflected in a fivefold increase in related complaints. The Agency continues to make efforts to increase and improve capacity. In 2022-23 there were over 50,000 vehicle appointments which the public failed to attend. The Agency is to conduct a survey to better understand the reasons for non-attendance; we have also introduced automatic reminders by default in the hope that this will improve customers' attendance at their appointments. An extra factor for vehicle test appointments has been the requests (over 25,000 in 2022-23) for 'urgent' re-scheduled appointments to allow customers to renew their Vehicle Tax.

6.0 The Way Forward

The Agency will continue in its efforts to improve services to customers and ensure that all staff are aware of the importance of good customer care. The following actions are proposed:

- Customer Services will emphasise to business areas the need to improve services so that the overall number of complaints the Agency receives is reduced.
- Customer Services will issue guidance and/or meet with staff on an ongoing basis to remind them of the correct processes for handling queries and complaints, the need for ownership of complaints and to discuss any issues across business areas.
- To improve response timescales, Directors will continue to be issued with a weekly report showing which complaints within their business area are approaching the deadline for response.
- Customer Services will continue to provide support and will be available for advice on all aspects of complaint handling and customer service. Customer Services also conducts periodic audits of responses to ensure that best practice is adhered to.
- The Agency has amended its complaints process to redefine what is/is not a complaint, and 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 complaint handlers to be better informed when dealing with complaints whilst still giving the customer assurances that they have a means of appeal.
- The new complaint handling tool includes a corrective action field to record any corrective actions or recommendations which the business area will introduce on the back of a complaint response.
- The importance of the complaints handling process and its usefulness as a way of improving customer interaction is constantly emphasised to all staff, particularly those who have direct responsibility for handling complaints.
- There are plans to survey customers on their experience of having their vehicle tested. The Agency also has a Quality Unit which ensures tests are delivered to ISO standards which are audited.
- Customer feedback will continue to be considered when prioritising changes to IT applications.

Staff at all levels within the Agency are committed to seeking improvement for the customer, and senior management support the importance of complaint handling. As stated in Principles of Good Complaint Handling – “good complaint handling requires strong and effective leadership; those in management positions will take the lead in ensuring good complaint handling, with regard to both the practice and the culture”. The Agency continues to be proactive in using complaints information to constantly improve its services.

7.0 Appendices

Appendix 1. Complaint Breakdown of Top 5 Business Areas by Top 5 Reasons

1a. Driver Licensing	
Complaint Reason	Number of Complaints
Licence Delay	254
Loss of Documents	26
Errors on Licence	15
Insufficient Advice Received	9
Accuracy & Non-Response to Correspondence	8

1b. Operations / Testing	
Complaint Reason	Number of Complaints
Decision of Test	105
Attitude of Staff/Examiner	94
Conduct of Test	27
Damage to Vehicle	18
Decision on FTA Appeal	9

1b1. Vehicle Testing	
Complaint Reason	Number of Complaints
Decision of Test	53
Attitude of Examiner / Staff	44
Damage to Vehicle	18
Conduct of Test	14
Refusal Process / FTA Appeal	6

*FTA - Failure to Attend

1b2. Driver Testing	
Complaint Reason	Number of Complaints
Decision of Test	52
Attitude of Examiner	48
Conduct of Test	13
FTA Appeal Decision	3
Cancellation Time Limit	2

1c. Operations / Bookings	
Complaint Reason	Number of Complaints
Availability of Appointments	62
Online Booking Issues	25
Non-Response to Queries	5
Time Limit for Cancelling Online	5
Customer Service	5

1d. Driver and Vehicle Standards	
Complaint Reason	Number of Complaints
Result of Test	5
Non-Response to Correspondence	4
CPC Hours Query	2
Customer Service	2
Other	4

*FTA - Failure to Attend

1e. nirect and Communications	
Complaint Reason	Number of Complaints
Customer Service	8
Attitude of Staff	4
Telephone Booking process	3
Insufficient Advice	2

Appendix 2: At a Glance Guide for Test Centres

Test Centre	Formal Complaints	Compliments Received	Upheld Incidents of Vehicle Damage (total claims made)
Armagh	17	-	2 (2)
Ballymena	22	-	2 (2)
Belfast	30	1	5 (4)
Coleraine	27	3	1 (1)
Cookstown	19	-	2 (3)
Craigavon	20	1	2 (2)
Downpatrick	10	-	1 (1)
Enniskillen	14	1	-
Larne	29	5	2 (2)
Lisburn	18	-	3 (3)
Newbuildings	41	4	1 (1)
Mallusk	7	-	5 (5)
Newry	13	1	3 (2)
Newtownards	45	-	3 (3)
Omagh	5	-	2 (2)
TOTAL	317	16	34 (33)



Safer Drivers, Safer Vehicles

Driver and Vehicle Agency

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Town Parks

BELFAST

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