



West College Scotland

Report on Complaints received during session 2017 – 2018

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## Context

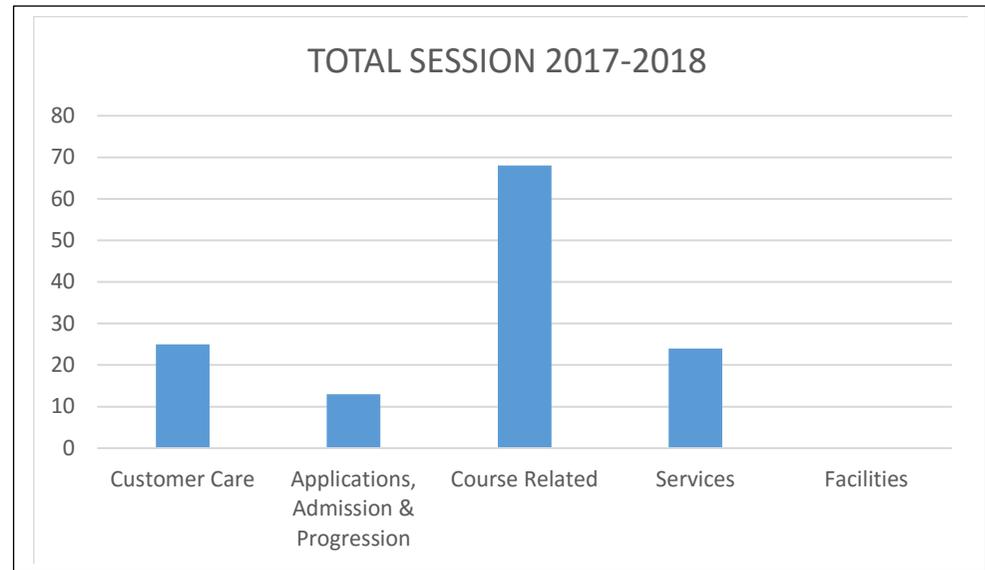
The College operates its complaints handling procedures in accordance with the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman. The college regards “expressions of dissatisfaction” as opportunities to review and amend its’ practices, and recognises complaints as key elements of learner [and other stakeholders] feedback. This report is a summary of the complaints received and actions taken for the academic session 2017 – 2018.

## Trends

The number of complaints received last session was 133. This was considerably less than the previous session, even allowing for high number of complaints relating to industrial action [during session 2016-2017].

Figures for the total number of complaints received for the last three sessions are provided below.

Total Number of Complaints by session		
2015 – 2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
168	301	133

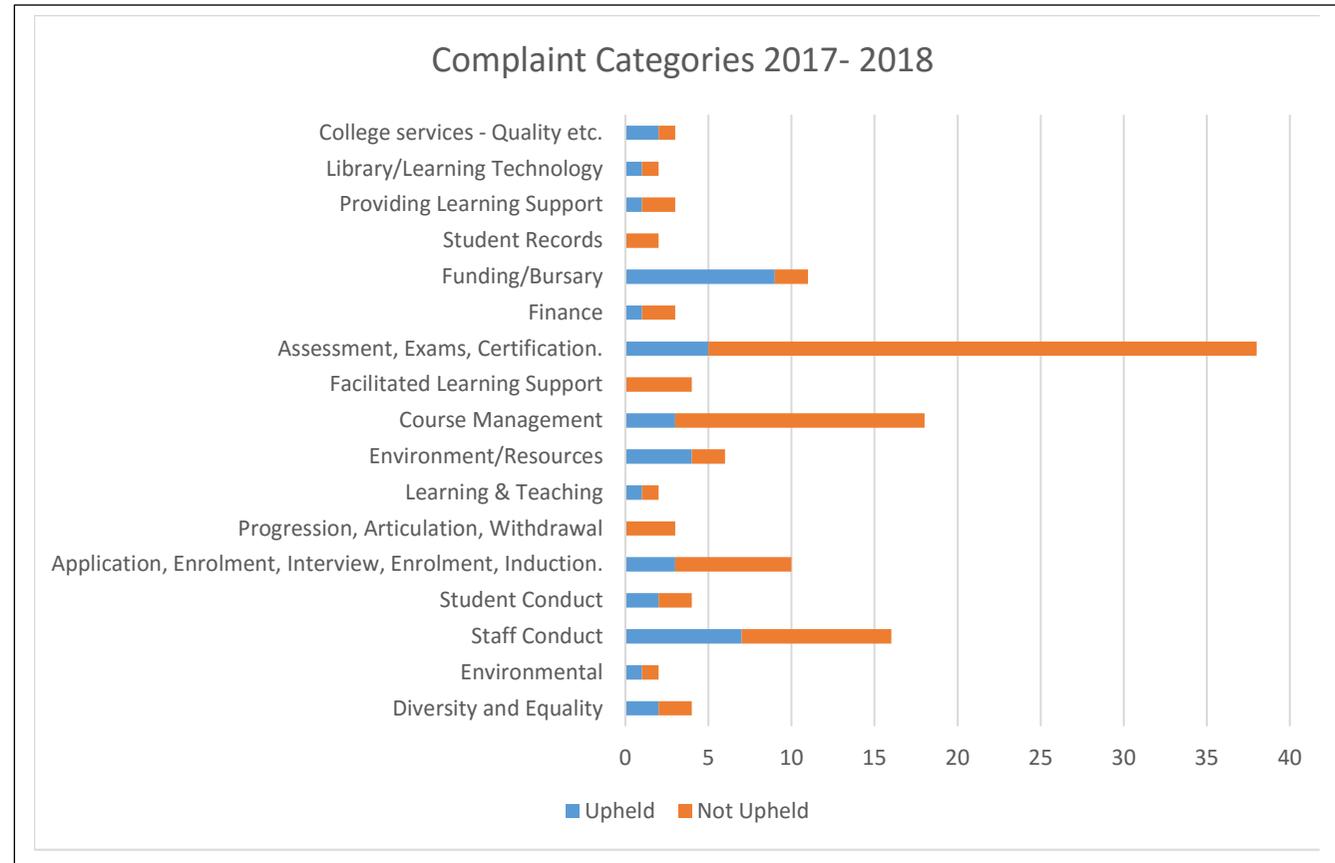


Most complaints received were categorised as “course related” – see chart. A more detailed breakdown is provided below.

A more detailed examination of the data reveals that the majority of complaints were concerned with:

- Assessment and Certification
- Course Management
- Staff Conduct

In particular, building works adjacent to Clydebank Campus caused issues for students sitting Higher English.

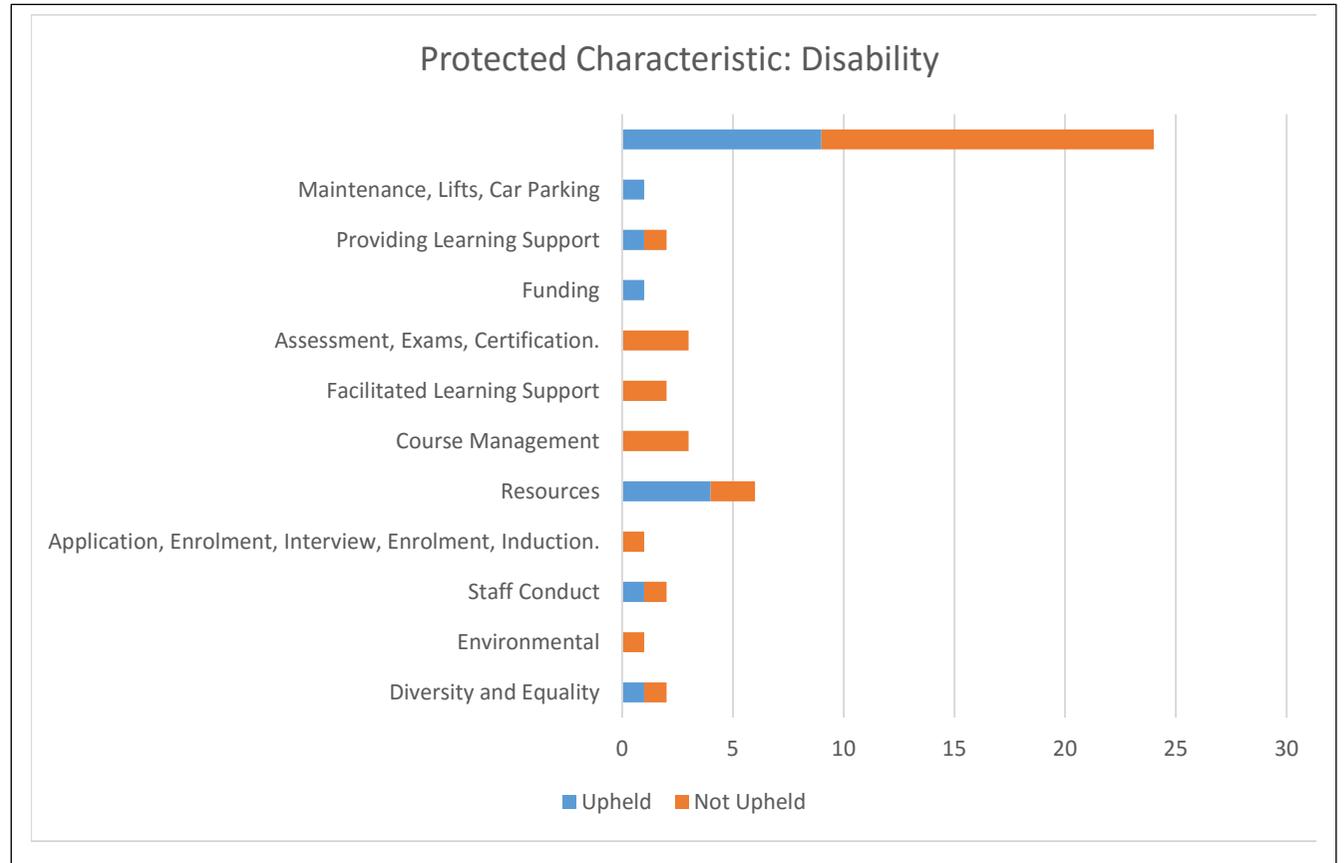


## Protected Characteristics

A total of 34 complainants identified a protected characteristic. Of these, 25 declared “Disability” as their characteristic. A breakdown of the complaints is provided in the chart. Only two complaints related to issues arising from their characteristic.

Four other students identified “Religion”, and “Sexual Orientation” as their characteristics. All were in relation to the same complaint concerning excessive noise during an assessment. Since the college had taken a number of pre-emptive measures to avoid this situation, the complaints were not upheld.

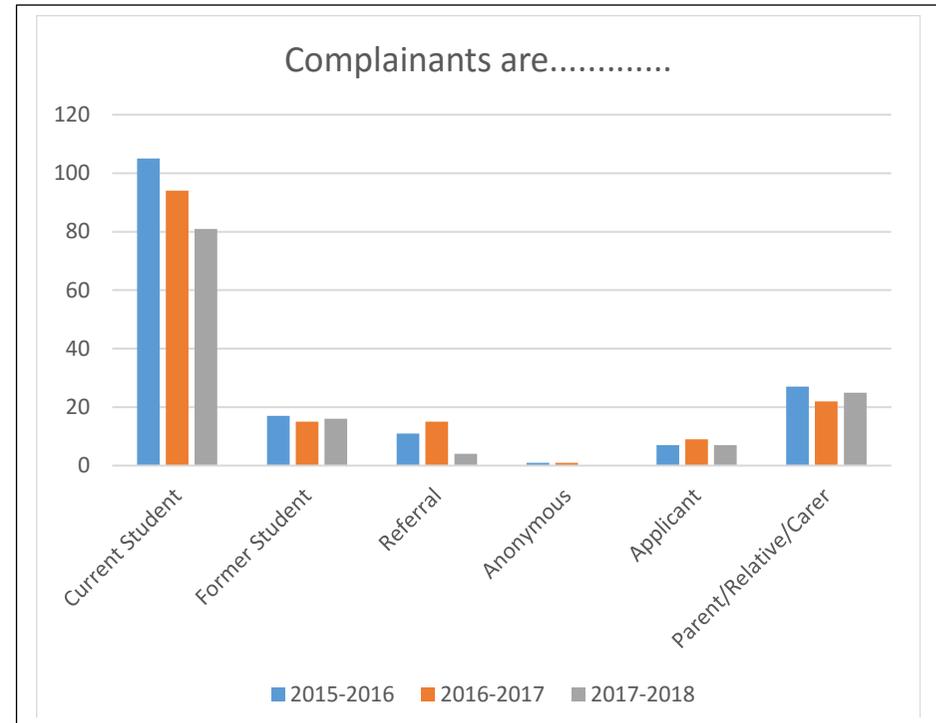
Overall 27% of complaints from complainants who declared a protected characteristic were upheld, compared to 33% being upheld for all complainants. One complaint from someone who declared a protected characteristic is being carried over into session 2018 – 2019.



### Who complains?

Complaints were received overwhelmingly by current students. The mixture of complainants is consistent with the previous session, as the graph demonstrates.

NB Figures for session 2016-2017 exclude complaints in relation to the industrial action.



### Feedback

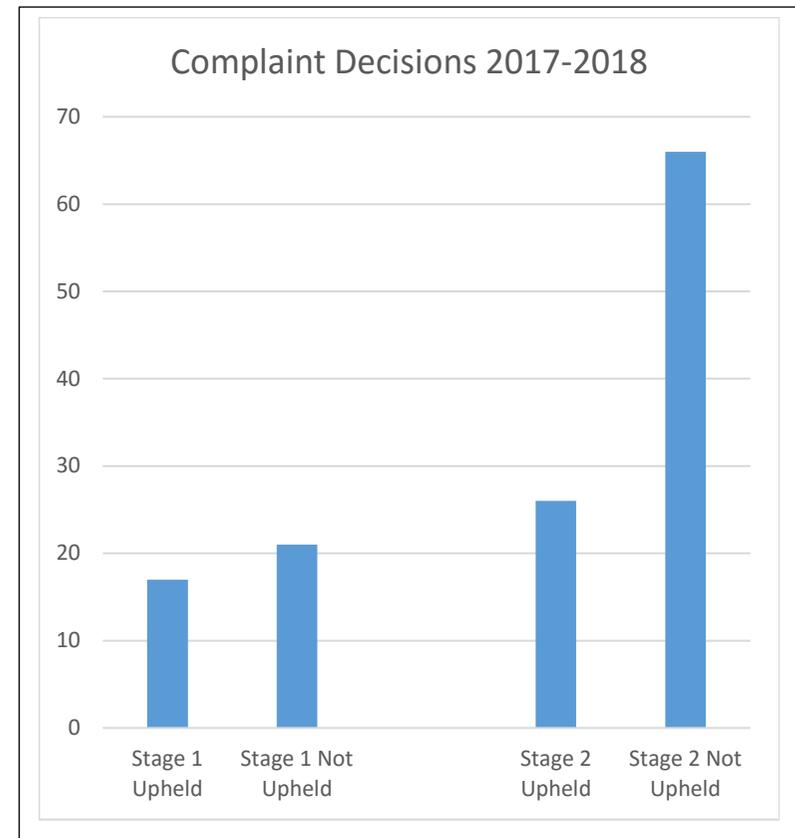
The college is keen to receive feedback on the experiences of the complainants, and issues a questionnaire shortly after the complaint is closed off. However, the response rate is very low at just 9%. Of those received, the majority have expressed dissatisfaction with their experiences, although it appears that their dissatisfaction is more to do with the decision reached rather than the process itself.



## Complaint Decisions

The SPSO uses two categories in relation to complaints. Some complaints can be responded to quickly. The SPSO refers to these as Stage 1 complaints, for which we received a total of 38 last session. Out of these 17 were upheld and 21 were not upheld.

Those which require investigation, and take longer to reply to, are referred to as Stage 2 Complaints by the SPSO. The college received 95 last session. Out of these 26 were upheld and 66 were not upheld. There were three complaints carried over into this session.



## **Lessons Learned**

Although the majority of complaints were not upheld, a number provide opportunities to review our practices and processes. The following describes a number of actions we have taken, or are taking, in relation to some of the complaints we have received last session. In addition, we will review our processes to encourage a higher proportion of stage 1 resolutions.

### **Complaint: Failure to provide advice on post results service**

The college has provided clearer guidance to staff and students on how this service works, in cases where an appeal on an externally devised assessment is undertaken. In particular, on the importance of adhering to the time-scales and required supporting evidence. The complainant referred this matter to the SPSO, who upheld the complaint.

### **Complaint: Failure to provide prompt staff cover during periods of staff illness absence.**

While short-term staff absence can generally be accommodated, periods of excessive or prolonged absence can be problematic. In this particular case, the college has recognised the need to keep students informed about the status of the measures being undertaken, and what arrangements – if any – are being considered to offset any time lost.

### **Complaint: Delays in repairing broken hoist**

This complaint highlighted the need to explain and inform those affected about the actions undertaken when repairing a complex piece of equipment; and thus manage unrealistic expectations. The need to utilise external contractors resulted in the repairs taking longer than the College would have liked.

### **Complaint: On-line assessment cancellation**

This complaint related to an on-line assessment undertaken in the evening. Technical difficulties meant that the dedicated equipment could not be used, and the assessment had to be re-scheduled. The college is working with its IT department to ensure that technical support is available when required, including evenings.

