West College Scotland

Report on Complaints received during session 2018 – 2019

Publication Date: 31st October 2019

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 2018 – 2019.

Trends

The number of complaints received last session was 97. This was considerably less than the previous session, reflecting an ongoing trend decline - 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.

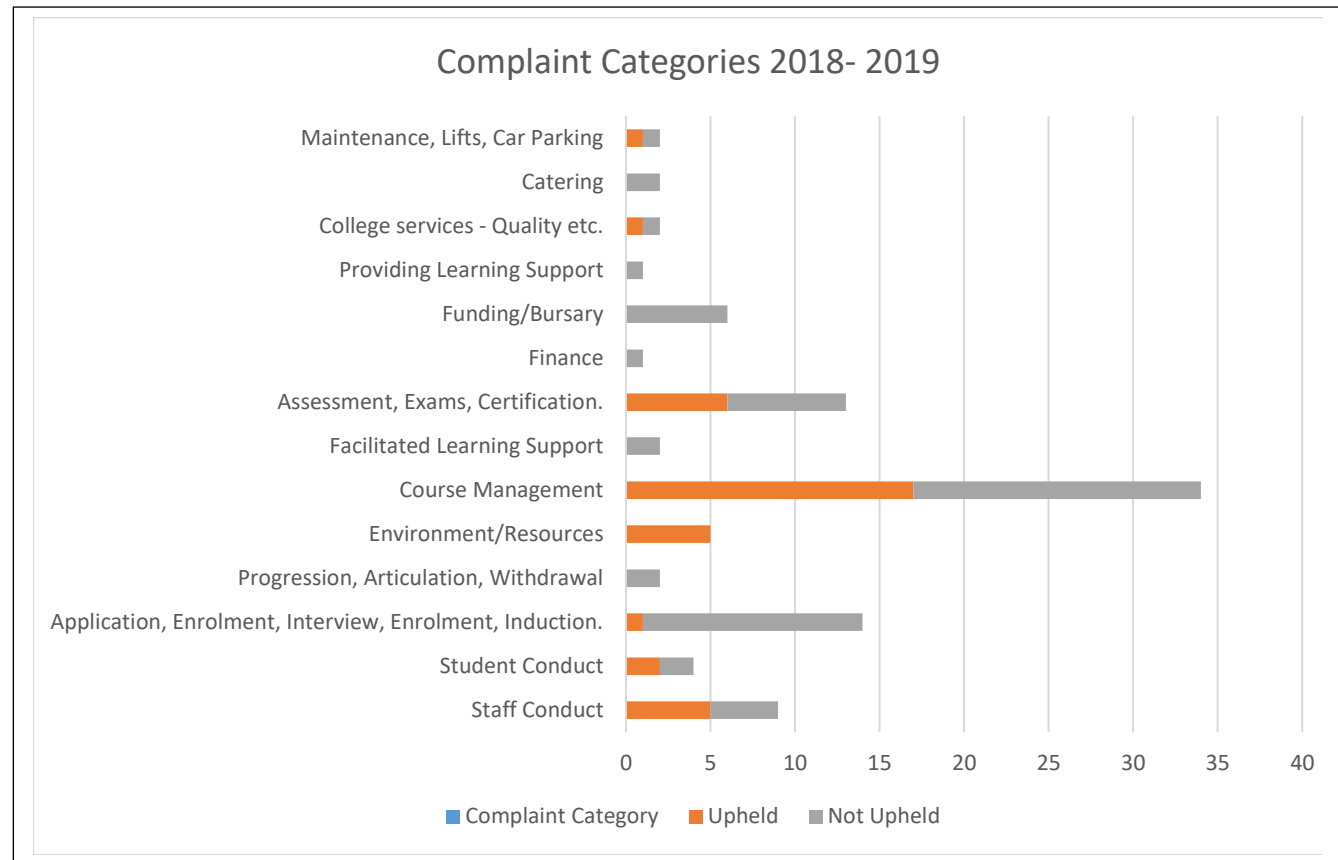| Total Number of Complaints by session		
2016 – 2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
301	133	97

TOTAL SESSION 2018-2019
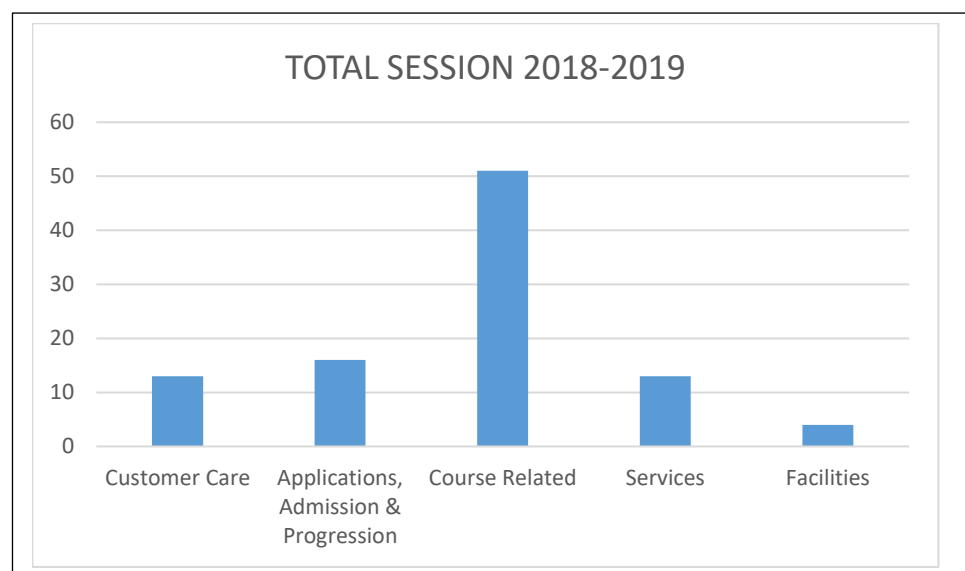
Most complaints received were categorised as "course related" – see chart. A more detailed breakdown is provided below.

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

- Course Management
- Assessment and Certification
- Application and related processes

Course Management complaints related to arrangements for covering staff absence, quality of provision of assessment feedback, and failure to make reasonable adjustments. 50% of the complaints in this category were upheld.

Complaint Categories 2018- 2019

Bar chart titled "Complaint Categories 2018- 2019" showing complaint categories with Upheld (orange) and Not Upheld (grey) values:

- Maintenance, Lifts, Car Parking
- Catering
- College services - Quality etc.
- Providing Learning Support
- Funding/Bursary
- Finance
- Assessment, Exams, Certification.
- Facilitated Learning Support
- Course Management
- Environment/Resources
- Progression, Articulation, Withdrawal
- Application, Enrolment, Interview, Enrolment, Induction.
- Student Conduct
- Staff Conduct

Legend: Complaint Category, Upheld, Not Upheld

Protected Characteristics

A total of 26 complainants identified a protected characteristic for session 2018-19. This is broadly similar to last session where we received 26 such complaints, although constitutes a larger proportion of the total [27% compared to 19%]

Overall 46% of complaints from complainants who declared a protected characteristic were upheld, compared to 39% being upheld for all complainants.

While "Course Management" was overwhelmingly the most common cause of complaint overall, it did not feature for any complainants with a protected characteristic for whom "Progression" was the most common area of concerns.

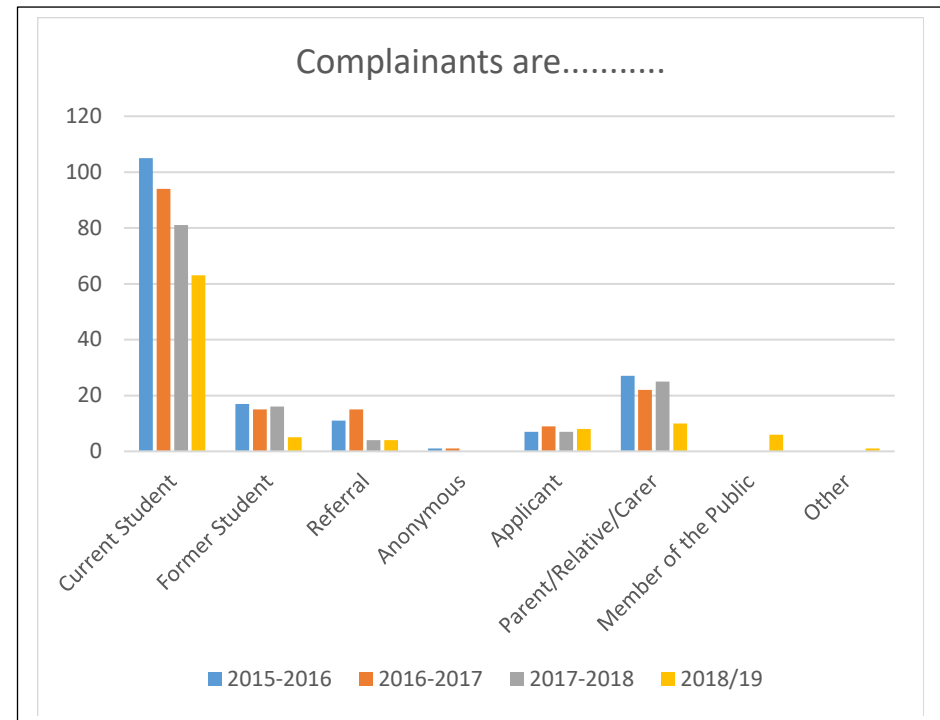Protected Characteristics by Complaint Category
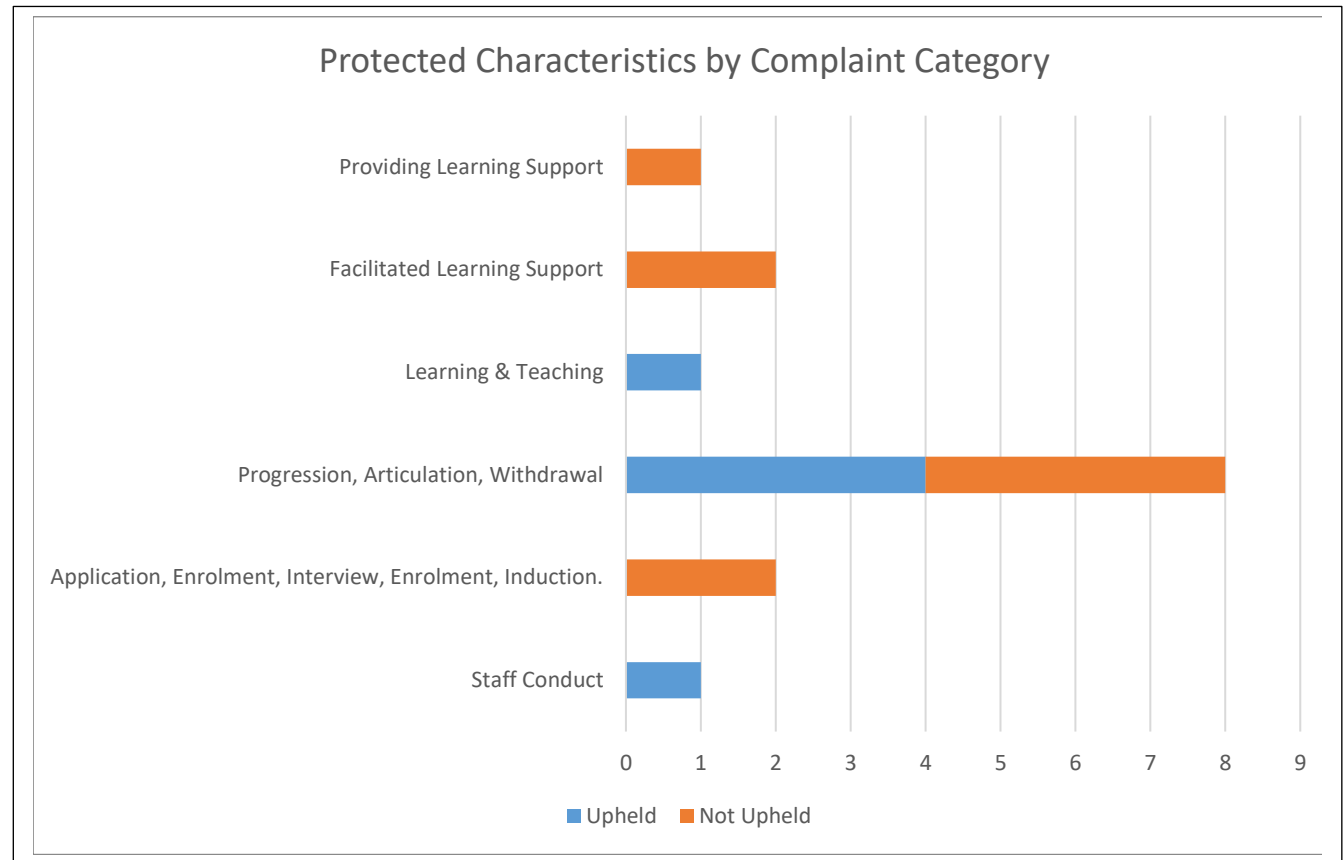
Who complains?

Complaints were received overwhelmingly by current students. The mixture of complainants is consistent with previous sessions, 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 5%. 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.

The College is reviewing the way in which feedback is gathered in an attempt to improve the response rate.

Complainants are...........

2015-2016 2016-2017 2017-2018 2018/19

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

■ Satisfied with process ■ Dissatisfied with process ■ No response

1% 4%

95%

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 39 last session. Out of these 17 were upheld and 22 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 58 last session. Out of these 25 were upheld and 33 were not upheld. One complaint has had to be carried over into this session.

Complaint Decisions 2018 - 2019
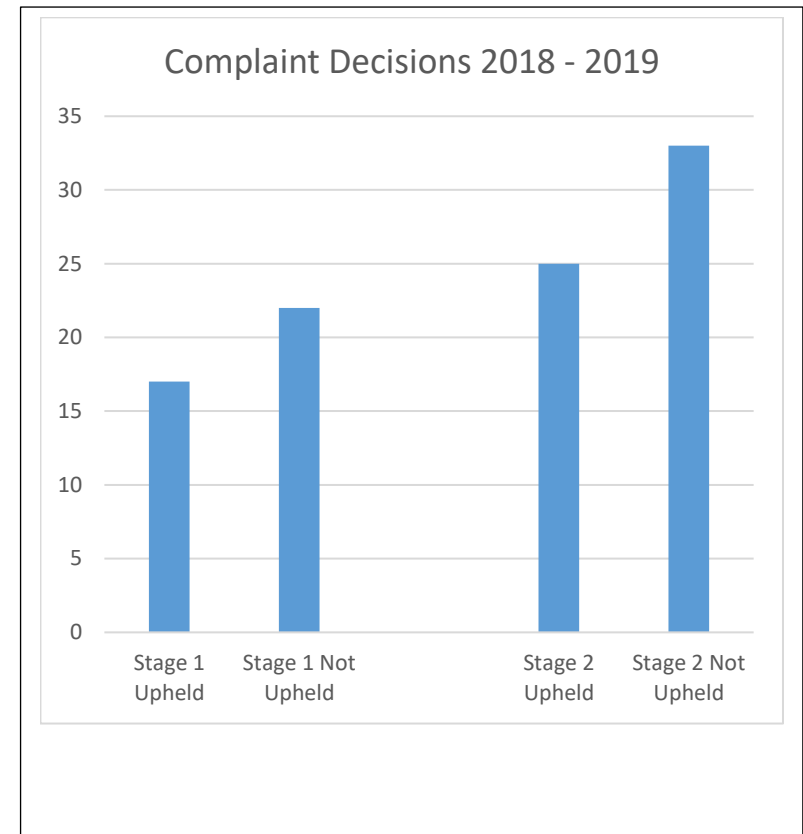
Lessons Learned

Although most complaints were not upheld, the process of submitting complaints provide opportunities for us to review our practices and processes. The following describes several actions we have taken, or are taking, in relation to some of the complaints we have received last session.

The decision not to provide National 5 Mathematics is detrimental for students wishing to progress to university

- Changes in award composition removed the maths provision. The College will now enhance the programme to allow for the inclusion of National 5 maths from session 2019-2020.

HND Science students wished for more opportunities to meet with potential employers.

- Curriculum team facilitated visit to Thermofisher [Industrial] and UWS Research Laboratory.

Applied Science students unhappy with the design of the curriculum

- Curriculum negotiated with the students to derive a curriculum which more closely matched their aspirations.

Engineering students expressed concerns about the composition of their course.

- The curriculum team negotiated with the students and have included additional introductory components as well as providing an optional maths unit.

Assessment and Feedback

Preference for fewer submissions by hard copy in Sports programmes.

- Curriculum team have facilitated utilisation of Office 365 and OneNote to address this.

Use of innovative assessment methods in Social Science programmes

- Curriculum team have adopted the use of Cahoot as an innovative and stimulating way of carrying out formative assessments.

Technology

Electrical students were unhappy about the level of IT support they were able to access.

- The curriculum team facilitated the provision of additional laptops allowing for better access to the VLE.

Electrical students wanted to make greater use of social media.

- The curriculum team facilitated access to learning materials and peer review via Facebook and Twitter.

TimeTables

Students complained about the planned finish date for their course in Sciences

- The curriculum team were able to introduce an earlier start date to accommodate the students' wishes

Science class wanted additional tuition regarding stem cells

- Curriculum team facilitated visit to Centre for Regenerative Medicine which provided an excellent learning opportunity

Childcare students expressed concerns about the timing of assessments for their course.

- The curriculum team has revised the assessment schedule, resulting in improved student attainment.

Accommodation

Health care students expressed concerns about the sound pollution occurring in certain rooms at the Clydebank Campus.

- The curriculum team have ensured these rooms are not being used for future cohorts.

Teaching and Learning

Science class requested a change in the revision methods used.

- Curriculum team adopted different revision methods for the pharmacology units.

Health Care students expressed concerns about the limited opportunities for group learning, and wished for a greater level of input from guest speakers.

- The curriculum team adjusted the delivery structure of the programme to include more group work activities and arranged for additional guest speakers. Student feedback indicated that students welcomed both developments.

Estates/Services

Students unhappy about disparity in catering provision between campuses, particularly at the Waterfront

- Following negotiations with the SA, the College has enhanced its provision at the Waterfront, although is unable to mirror exactly provision elsewhere.

SPSO Referrals

The College had two complaints referred to the SPSO which resulted in changes to some of our procedures. Specifically:

- We have made amendments to both the Student Attendance and Progress Procedure, and the Social Media Policy.

  o Changes to the Student Attendance and Progress Policy provided further guidance on arrangements for self-certification and authorised absence.

  o Changes to the Social Media Policy are intended to give additional guidance to curriculum teams using social media, particularly when informing students of their progress.

- The Complaints Handling Procedure, which provides further guidance on how to deal with a response to the complainant after the formal response has been provided.

  o In particular will differentiate between those post formal response situations where the complainant:

    - Seeks to query the decision – will refer the complainant to the SPSO's guidance on how to appeal the decision

    - Seeks clarification on the process – will respond based on further clarification from the Investigating Manager

COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE INDICATORS	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4		YTD		20-17-2018	
1.0 Total number of complaints received & complaints received per 100 population												
1.1 Complaints Received	25		13		15		39		92		133	
1.2 College Population	11955	0.2	16284	0.1	18064	0.1	18064	0.2	18064	0.5	23610	0.6
2.0 Number of complaints closed at each stage and as a % of all complaints closed												
2.1 Number of complaints closed at Stage 1 and % of total closed	21	84.0%	6	46.2%	6	40.0%	14	35.9%	47	51.1%	38	28.6%
2.2 Number of complaints closed at Stage 2 and % of total closed	2	8.0%	6	46.2%	9	60.0%	25	64.1%	42	45.7%	92	69.2%
2.3 Number of complaints closed after Escalation and % of total closed	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
2.4 Open	2	8.0%	1	7.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	3.3%	3	2.3%
3.0 STAGE 1: Target timescales within 5 working days												
3.1 Number and % Stage 1 complaints upheld	11	52.4%	1	16.7%	2	33.3%	3	21.4%	17	36.2%	17	44.7%
3.2 Number and % Stage 1 complaints not upheld	10	47.6%	5	83.3%	4	66.7%	11	78.6%	30	63.8%	21	55.3%
3.3 Total working days and average time in working days to close complaints at Stage 1	66	3.1	26	4.3	23	3.8	75	5.4	190	4.0	93	2.4
3.4 Number and % Stage 1 complaints closed within 5 working days	18	85.7%	3	50.0%	4	66.7%	7	50.0%	32	68.1%	38	100.0%
3.5 Number and % Stage 1 complaints not closed within 5 working days	3	14.3%	3	50.0%	2	33.3%	7	50.0%	15	31.9%	0	0.0%
3.6 Number and % of Stage 1 complaints closed within 10 working days (extension)	3	100.0%	3	100.0%	2	100.0%	7	100.0%	15	100.0%	0	0.0%
3.7 Number and % of Stage 1 complaints not closed within 10 working days (extension)	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
4.0 STAGE 2: Target timescales within 20 working days												
4.1 Number and % Stage 2 complaints upheld	0	0.0%	2	33.3%	6	66.7%	13	52.0%	21	50.0%	26	28.3%
4.2 Number and % Stage 2 complaints not upheld	2	100.0%	4	66.7%	3	33.3%	12	48.0%	21	50.0%	66	71.7%
4.3 Total working days and average time in working days to close complaints at Stage 2	42	21.0	192	32.0	257	28.6	649	26.0	1140	27.1	1540	16.7
4.4 Number and % Stage 2 complaints closed within 20 working days	1	50.0%	1	16.7%	5	55.6%	11	44.0%	18	42.9%	56	60.9%
4.5 Number and % Stage 2 complaints not closed within 20 working days	1	50.0%	5	83.3%	4	44.4%	14	56.0%	24	57.1%	36	39.1%
4.6 Number and % of Stage 2 complaints closed within 40 working days (extension)	1	100.0%	3	60.0%	2	50.0%	13	100.0%	19	79.2%	17	47.2%
4.7 Number and % of Stage 2 complaints not closed within 40 working days (extension)	0	0.0%	2	40.0%	2	50.0%	1	100.0%	5	20.8%	19	52.8%
5.0 ESCALATED : Complaints escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2												
5.1 Number and % Escalated complaints upheld	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
5.2 Number and % Escalated complaints not upheld	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
5.3 Total working days and average time in working days to close complaints at Stage 1		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0
5.4 Number and % of Escalated complaints closed within 20 working days	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
5.5 Number and % of Escalated complaints not closed within 20 working days	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
5.6 Number and % of Escalated complaints closed within 40 working days (extension)	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%