ANNUAL COMPLAINTS HANDLING REPORT

2020-21

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WEST COLLEGE SCOTLAND

Context

The College operates its complaints handling procedures in line with the requirements of public sector bodies as advised by the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO).

The College regards stakeholder expressions of dissatisfaction as opportunities to review, amend and improve our services, and we recognise complaints as a key element of student feedback.

This report presents a summary of complaints received, and their outcomes, for the academic session 2020 – 2021 (August 2020 to July 2021). During this period there were two main factors that directly impacted on our complaints handling processes:

1. During COVID 19 restrictions, from March 2020 there has been minimal stakeholder and staff access to campuses. Our complaints handling arrangements were administered remotely and, in a few cases, this resulted in extended investigation response times.

2. The SPSO introduced a revised model for the public sector and the updated College Complaints Handling Procedure was implemented in April 2021. While the general ethos for dealing with complaints remains the same, several revisions to our procedures were required mid-session.
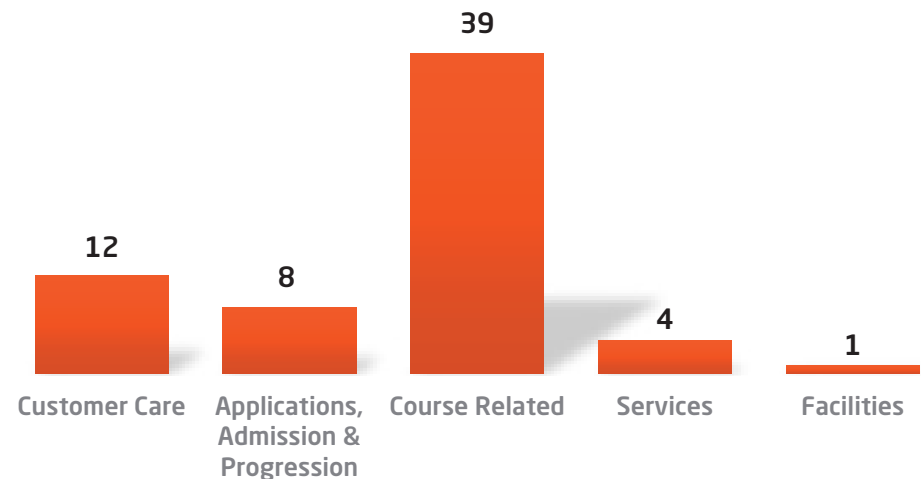
Access to Our Complaints Handling Procedure:
▶ **Internally staff can access the Procedure here via the staff intranet**
▶ **A guide for students can be accessed here via the college website**
▶ **An online Complaints Form is available via the college website**

Section 1- Data and Trends

The collated data table is shown in Appendix 1. This extract highlights that the number of complaints received last session was 64, slightly lower than in the previous session, and reflecting an ongoing trend decline. Figures for the total number of complaints received for the last three sessions are provided below.

Total Number of Complaints by session

2018 – 2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
97	70	64

Total Session 2020-2021

| Customer Care	Applications, Admission & Progression	Course Related	Services	Facilities
12	8	39	4	1

Complaint Categories

Analysis of the data reveals that most complaints related to:

▶ **Learning and Teaching**
▶ **Course Management**
▶ **Staff Conduct**

Learning and Teaching complaints were mainly related to remote, online learning experiences and included student-related complaints on limited access to the use of recorded lessons, use of cameras, limited time available for questioning on learning topics, difficulties in accessing learning materials/navigating materials on Moodle etc.

Course Management complaints related to arrangements for covering staff absence, quality and quantity of provision of assessment feedback, and failure to make reasonable adjustments to support assessment.

2020-2021 Types of Complaint

Legend: Not Upheld, Upheld
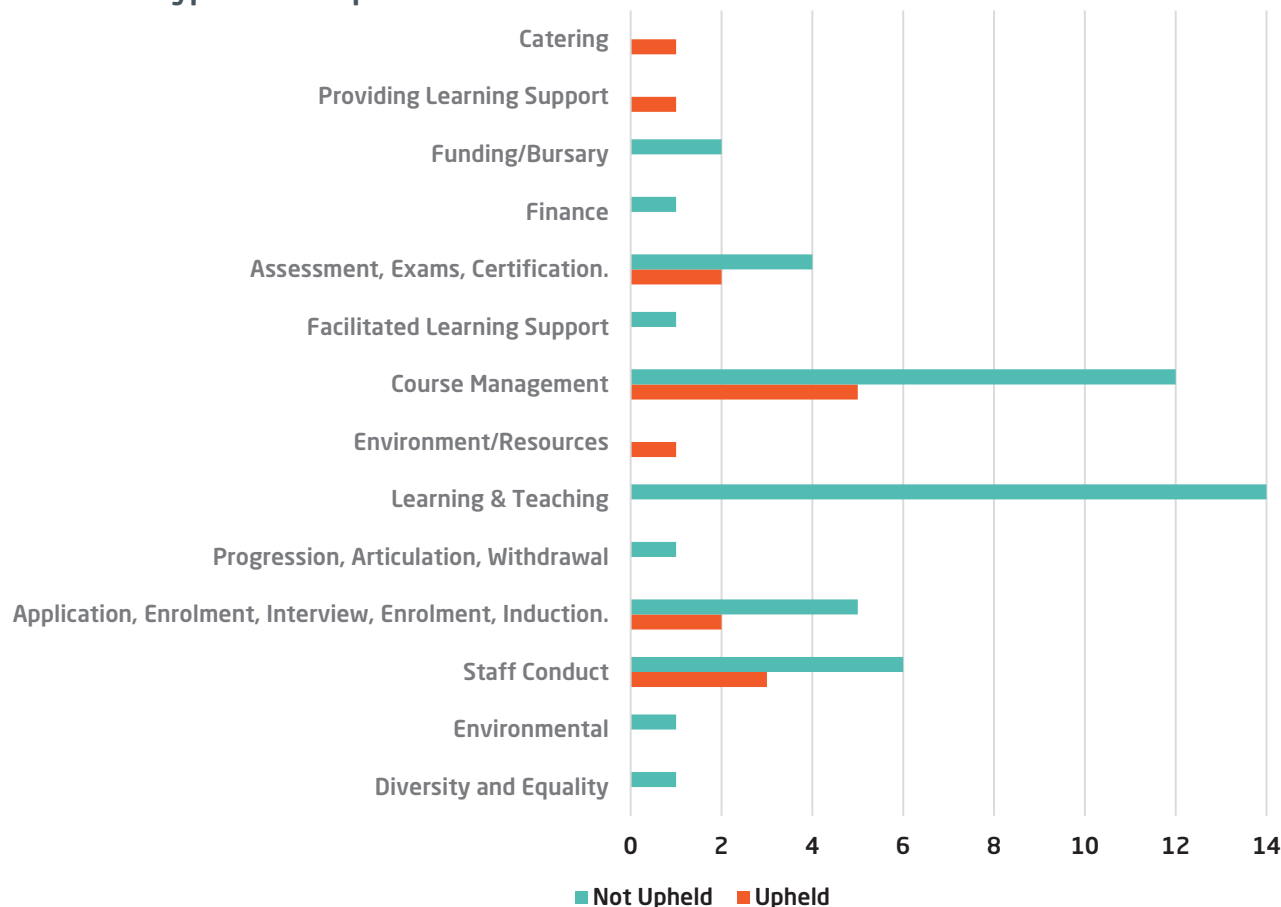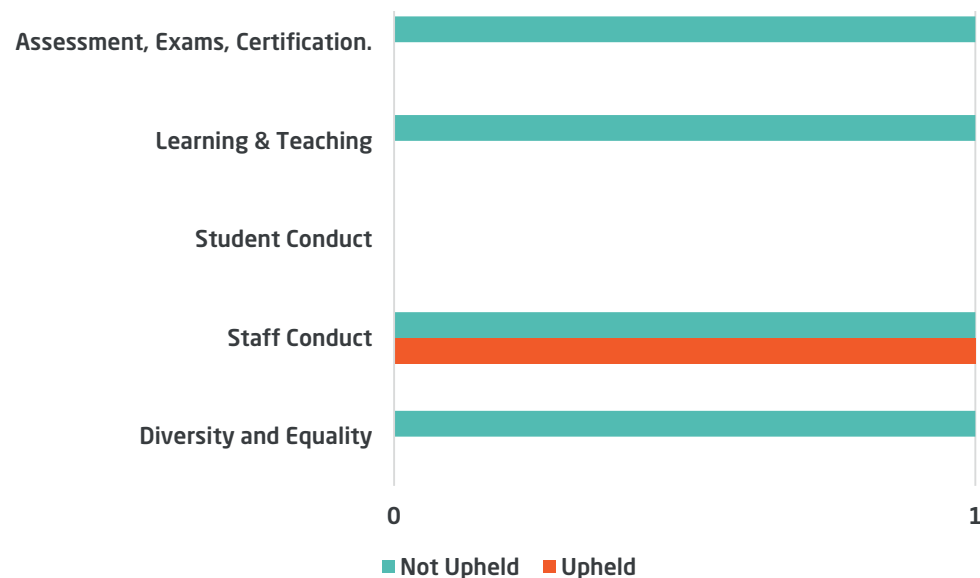
Protected Characteristics - Disability

A total of 5 complainants declared a disability in session 2020-21. This is fewer than last session where we received 18 such complaints.

This session, complainants who disclosed a disability accounted for 8% of all complaints received, and this constitutes a considerably smaller proportion compared to the previous session (26%).

Only one complaint, of the five received, was upheld from complainants who declared a protected characteristic - 20% total compared with 24% being upheld for all complainants.

The decrease in complaints from those with a declared disability, while welcome, prompts further analysis of all those with protected characteristics, to assess whether COVID 19 lock down and restricted access to on campus staff and support services, impacted to a greater or lesser degree on those students with protected characteristics.

Protected Characteristic Types of Complaint

Assessment, Exams, Certification.

Learning & Teaching

Student Conduct

Staff Conduct

Diversity and Equality

0   1

■ Not Upheld ■ Upheld

Who complains?

Complaints were received mainly from current students. The broad mix of complainants is consistent with previous sessions, as the graph demonstrates. When former students complain, it is mainly around past assessment outcomes or delayed certification.

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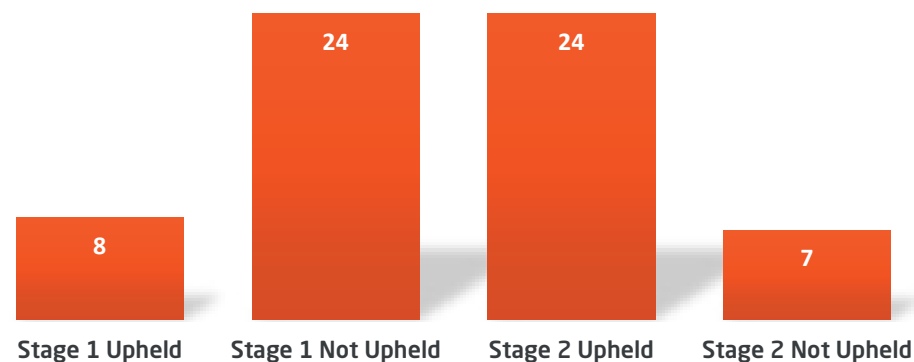

Complaint Decisions

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 categorised a total of 32 last session. Out of these 8 were upheld and 24 were not upheld. We have looked at why some complaints were not upheld at Stage 1 and conclude that, in most cases, the complainant had requested a service that was already available to them.

Those which require investigation, and take longer to reply to, are referred to as Stage 2 Complaints by the SPSO. The College escalated 31 complaints last session to Stage 2. Of these 24 were upheld and 7 were not upheld. One complaint has been carried over into session 2021 – 2022 as its resolution was still ongoing at the reporting end date.

Complaint Decisions

Stage 1 Upheld	Stage 1 Not Upheld	Stage 2 Upheld	Stage 2 Not Upheld
8	24	24	7
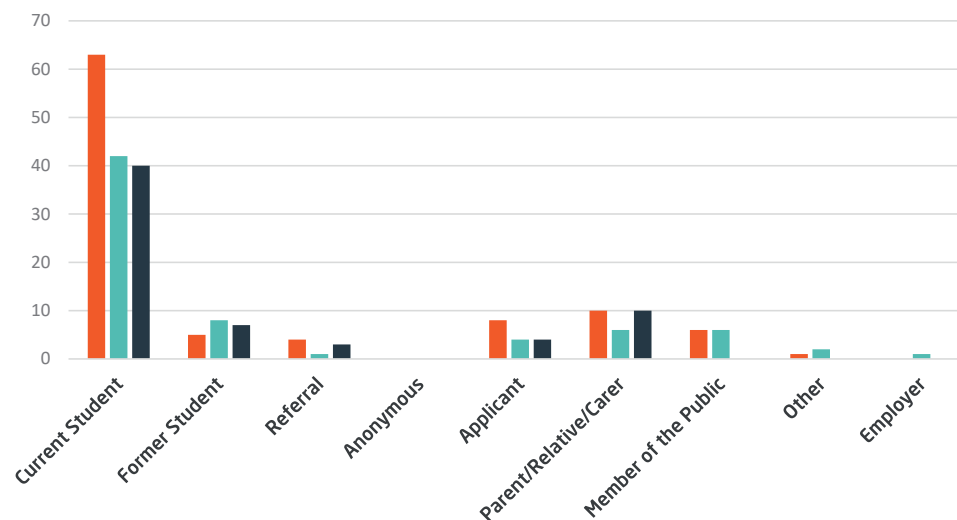
Lessons Learned

The overwhelming majority of complaints were related directly or indirectly to learning and assessment arrangements, mainly arising from the College required response to Scottish Government COVID 19 guidance. We are aware that Stage 2 complaints, in some cases, are taking longer than we would like to resolve. Most delays result from internal investigations which, when conducted entirely remotely, involve excessive response waiting times. We are actively pursuing alternative methods to our current process for investigating potentially lengthy investigations, in other than the most serious cases.

The following outlines some consequential changes implemented by the College, and which continually improve our services to students.

Complaints relating to online learning experiences

We have improved and expanded our provision of guidance and training for learning and teaching online for both staff and students

- **106 staff training events covering 18 different threads, including:**
  - ▷ **Using MS Teams**
  - ▷ **Online Learning Techniques**
  - ▷ **Teaching Techniques for Virtual Learning Sessions**
  - ▷ **Development and launch of a Virtual Hub providing a single point of access for staff resources**
- **Developing Digital Confidence Online module was made available for all students**
- **Class Representative Training has been improved for accessibility and available online**

Complaints relating to IT resources

- **Chromebooks purchased and distributed to students**
- **Laptops distributed to meet specific course software and/or learner requirements**
- **Creating direct access to IT support for students via the student intranet**
- **Replacing the Wi-Fi network in all three main campus locations**
- **Student Tech Team established and active on each campus**

Complaints relating to campus access arrangements

Significant College resource has been invested in establishing a safe on campus learning environment, including

- **Producing clear guidance on reporting [COVID] symptoms**
- **Creating clear signage re social distancing measures**
- **Limiting numbers of staff and students on campus**
- **Providing sanitised cleaning cloths and hand sanitisers for visitors, staff and students.**

Compliance with the model SPSO complaints handling procedure

- **A few complaints have taken longer than normal at investigation stage, increasing the average response time from 22.7 to 45.7 days since last session. To address this, we are automating more time bound features of our Complaints Handling Procedure through use of Pentana software.**
- **We can further improve on our complaints handling by delivering awareness and training for all College staff, notably around prompt referral for inclusion in the central register. This will help us accurately determine the overall volume and nature of complaints currently being raised and dealt with directly at departmental level.**

Satisfaction Trend

On complaint closure, we ask all complainants if they are satisfied with our handling of their complaint.

▶ **82% of Stage 1 Complainants felt their complaint was taken seriously (compared to 58% in session 2019-2020)**

▶ **100% of Stage 2 Complainants felt their complaint was taken seriously (compared to 43% in session 2019-2020)**

▶ **Overall satisfaction rating: 72% (compared to 54% overall rating in 2019-2020)**

SPSO Referrals

The College had no complaints referred to the SPSO during session 2020-2021.

Appendix 1
Data Table Session 2020-21

	COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE INDICATORS	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4		YTD		2019-20	
1.0	**Total number of complaints received & complaints received per 100 population**												
1.1	Complaints Received											70	
1.2	College Population	19640	0.0	19640	0.0	19640	0.0	19640	0.0	19640	0.0	18064	0.4
2.0	**Number of complaints closed at Stage 1 and % of total closed**												
2.1	Number of complaints closed at Stage 1 and % of total closed		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%	0	0.0%	42	60.0%
2.2	Number of complaints closed at Stage 2 and % of total closed		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%	0	0.0%	27	38.6%
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	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%		0.0%	0	0.0%	1	1.4%
3.0	**STAGE 1: Target timescales within 5 working days**												
3.1	Number and % Stage 1 complaints upheld		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%	0	0.0%	17	40.5%
3.2	Number and % Stage 1 complaints not upheld		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%	0	0.0%	25	59.5%
3.3	Total working days and average time in working days to close complaints at Stage 1												
3.4	Number and % Stage 1 complaints closed within 5 working days		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%	0	0.0%	23	54.8%
3.5	Number and % Stage 1 complaints not closed within 5 working days		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%	0	0.0%	17	40.5%
3.6	Number and % of Stage 1 complaints closed within 10 working days (extension)		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%	0	0.0%	17	100.0%
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**									0			
4.1	Number and % Stage 2 complaints upheld		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%	0	0.0%	15	55.6%
4.2	Number and % Stage 2 complaints not upheld		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%	0	0.0%	12	44.4%
4.3	Total working days and average time in working days to close complaints at Stage 2		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0	0	0.0	612	22.7
4.4	Number and % Stage 2 complaints closed within 20 working days		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%	0	0.0%	17	63.0%
4.5	Number and % Stage 2 complaints not closed within 20 working days		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%	0	0.0%	10	37.0%
4.6	Number and % of Stage 2 complaints closed within 40 working days (extension)		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%	0	0.0%	9	90.0%
4.7	Number and % of Stage 2 complaints not closed within 40 working days (extension)	0	0.0%	0	0.0%		0.0%		0.0%	0	0.0%	2	20.0%
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%
5.7	Number and % of Escalated complaints not closed within 40 working days (extension)	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

Definitions

Further Education Complaints Performance Indicators

The following definitions for stage 1, stage 2, and escalated should be consistently applied throughout all indicators.

Stage 1	This means those responded to at stage 1 (frontline resolution).
	This does not include those escalated from stage 1 to stage 2. These will be counted in the escalated complaints.
	This includes those where the extended timeline (i.e. + additional 5 working days) was used.
Stage 2	This means those responded to at stage 2 (investigation).
	This refers to those complaints considered directly at stage 2 for the following reasons:
	* straight away by complainant (this refers to customers who did not wish to be dealt with at stage 1 and wished to go straight to stage 2)
	* straight away by the College, or within a day or so after due consideration (i.e. College recognised complex, serious, high risk nature of the complaint and felt it was not suitable to be considered at stage 1)
	This includes those where the extended timeline (i.e. + additional 20 working days) was used.
Escalated	This means those escalated from stage 1 to stage 2.
	This refers to those complaints where the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the frontline resolution and have requested that their case be escalated to stage 2 for investigation.
	This includes those complaints where escalation was required because frontline resolution timescales were not met (i.e. 11 working days or more). Therefore automatic escalation rules apply.
Population	This figure will represent the total student population. For example the number of matriculated students at an agreed date.
CDN	College Development Network
SPSO	Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman