Complaint Handling Procedure Annual Report 2020-21

Contents

Section 1 Introduction and overview

Section 2 Key Performance Indicators:

- Indicator 1 - Learning from complaints
- Indicator 2 - The total number of complaints received
- Indicator 3 - The number and % of complaints at each stage which were closed within the set timescales of five and 20 working days
- Indicator 4 - The average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage
- Indicator 5 - The outcome of complaints at each stage
- Indicator 6 - Raising awareness
- Indicator 7 - Staff training in complaint handling
- Indicator 8 - Customer satisfaction

Appendix 1 - Complaints by category

Appendix 2 - Complaints by sub-category

Published: November 2021

Section 1 Introduction and overview

Scotland's public sector has a duty to respond positively to complaints. Glasgow Clyde College adopted the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's (SPSO's) Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) for the FE sector in August 2013.

Following consultation with a wide range of public sectors, SPSO revised and reissued MCHPs and Glasgow Clyde College implemented the revised FE sector MCHP in April 2021.

The main changes are as follows:

- There is now a **core text** standardised across all sectors (with additional sector-specific text and examples in each version of the MCHP).
- The CHP is presented in **five parts** to make relevant information easier to find.
- Organisations may **resolve** a complaint by agreeing any action to be taken with the customer, without making a decision on whether to uphold/not uphold.
- Organisations must **agree points of complaint and outcome sought** with the complainant at the start of Stage 2.
- The **six-month** timeframe to make a complaint also now applies where the customer wishes to **escalate to Stage 2** because they are unhappy with the Stage 1 response.
- Organisations must **share** relevant parts of the complaint and response with any **staff members complained about** and provide them with information about the complaint process and **support** available.
- Organisations should set out actions staff may take to **support equal access** to the complaints process (including for vulnerable groups).
- Organisations must respond to complaints on the organisation's own **social media** channels by signposting to the complaint process and support available.
- Where a complaint is brought by an **MP/MSP**, the organisation must handle it in line with the CHP.
- Organisations must **report and publish on complaint statistics** in line with PIs published by the SPSO.

Whilst Glasgow Clyde College always aims to provide the highest possible quality of service, we recognise that there are times when we fail to meet the expectations of our customers. The College welcomes complaints as they can provide information that helps us to learn and improve the way our services are delivered.

We regard a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction, by one or more individuals, about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us, or on our behalf.

We try to resolve complaints to the satisfaction of the customer wherever possible. Where this isn't possible, complainants are provided with a clear response to each of their points of complaint. We try to respond as quickly as we can and, on the spot, where possible. Not every complaint is resolved to the satisfaction of the customer, but they are all addressed.

Our complaints process provides two opportunities to resolve (close) complaints internally – Early Resolution and Investigation.

Early Resolution (Stage 1) aims to resolve straightforward complaints at the earliest opportunity, as close to the point of service delivery as possible. Any member of staff may deal with complaints at this stage by having a face-to-face discussion with the person or asking an appropriate member of staff to deal directly with the complaint. In either case, the complaint may be settled by providing an on-the-spot apology where appropriate, or explaining why the issue occurred and, where possible, what will be done to stop this happening again. Most complaints received by Glasgow Clyde College are handled at this stage.

Complaints are escalated to Investigation stage (Stage 2) when Early Resolution was tried but the person making the complaint remained dissatisfied and requested an investigation into the complaint. Complaints are also handled directly at Stage 2, without first attempting Early Resolution, when the issues raised are complex and clearly require detailed investigation; or the complaint relates to serious, high-risk or high-profile issues.

Following completion of our internal process, if a complainant remains dissatisfied, they can ask the SPSO or one of our awarding bodies to consider their complaint further, and we advise them of this right.

The 2020-21 reporting period provides the eighth full year of data under SPSO's MCHP for the FE sector. This report provides information on:

- how we learned and made improvements as a result of considering the complaints we received;
- the number of complaints we received;
- at what stage we dealt with complaints;
- the time taken to deal with complaints; and
- the outcome of complaints.

It also provides some detail on how we raise awareness of our CHP, how we provide staff training in complaint handling and how satisfied our customers were with how their complaint was handled.

It is worth noting that a number of complaints handled during the 2020-21 arose as a result of circumstances relating to COVID-19.

Section 2 Key Performance Indicators

Indicator 1 - Learning from complaints

Monitoring complaints information and the preparation and sharing of regular reports, including this annual report, helps to provide Glasgow Clyde College, and the public, with information on how complaints are handled and used to identify learning.

Glasgow Clyde College employs six main categories (split into 30 further sub-categories) when recording complaints. Appendices 1 and 2 of this report provide further detail on the volume of complaints recorded in each category/sub-category.

The following summarises lessons learned, improvements made, and actions taken as a result of complaints received in each category/sub-category.

C1 Customer Care

Since adopting SPSO's MCHP in 2013, the category in which most complaints are typically received is **Customer Care**, however during 2020-21 there was a significant reduction in the number of complaints in this category, with only 21 compared to 51 during 2019-20. Learning and actions taken were as follows:

A **Health and Safety** concern was raised relating to COVID safety rules not being followed by some students, particularly in relation to mask wearing; more specifically in lifts. The College have implemented a significant number of mechanisms to emphasise the importance of complying with Scottish Government Guidance, including signage, social media campaigns, face to face discussions and electronic correspondence with staff and students, therefore this complaint was not upheld. However there was further commitment to highlighting the concerns raised with senior staff in the College, to ensure reiteration of this important message to all staff with students on campus.

A **Diversity and Equality** concern was raised relating to alleged racist behaviour, and whilst there was inadequate evidence to support this claim, it was acknowledged that Glasgow Clyde College have committed to redoubling efforts to reduce racism by:

- Sending senior managers to racism awareness training.
- Reviewing staff induction processes, with regards to inculcating appropriate values and behaviours.
- Planning College-wide training in racial equality for the staff population.
- Setting up a new working group to review College race awareness initiatives.
- Setting measurable targets for staff and student recruitment and educational outputs for ethnic minorities.
- Consulting with members of ethnic minorities to gain a deeper insight into their lived experience.

C1 Customer Care continued

Environmental complaints were received from some College neighbours regarding noisy gritting machines being used in the College car park late at night. As a result of this being highlighted, the sub-contractor was instructed to adjust the timings of future gritting activity and asked to modify the settings on machinery to reduce the noise to the lowest possible level.

Staff Conduct complaints were received during 2020-21 for reasons including poor attitude, unprofessional behaviour, inflexible and impersonal approach, unfair treatment in relation to assessment, failure to respond to repeat emails and phone calls and failure of staff to accept feedback regarding their teaching. Whilst not all of these complaints were upheld, actions introduced to bring about improvements included providing additional staff training; reminding staff that students must be spoken to in a professional manner at all times; implementing classroom strategies for avoiding negative perceptions; seeking regular student feedback and inviting comment from class reps; amending timetabling to provide the best learning fit for a student; and organising an appointment for a student with the Learning Inclusion department to assess their needs.

A few complaints regarding **Student Conduct** came from members of the wider community and where the students were identifiable, the Student Discipline Procedure was invoked, and action taken as appropriate. In addition the Student Association distributed information concerning the importance of respecting our community in relation to litter and behaviour, via email and social media.

C2 Application, Admission and Progression

In session 2020-21, Glasgow Clyde College handled nearly 25,000 applications, with eight complaints received in the **Applications, Admission and Progression** category. All eight complaints in this category were recorded in the **Application, Admission, Interview, Enrolment and Induction** sub-category.

A complaint was received from an individual who applied for a course at the start of the academic summer break, and after waiting several weeks for a response, was informed that the course was full. Investigation ascertained that the course was full before the end of term but had been left open to applications throughout the summer to acquire reserves. Staff were reminded that where courses are full, applicants must be informed up front that they are applying for a reserve list and are not guaranteed a place. The student was subsequently offered an unconditional place on an alternative course.

An applicant was advised that they would receive a telephone interview due to face-to-face interviews being cancelled during COVID lockdown. A communication error resulted in the interview failing to be arranged, and the application instead being withdrawn. Following review of this complaint, the applicant was offered an interview for the 2021-22 session or alternatively a guaranteed place on a Gateway course commencing 2020-21, which would prepare them for undertaking their course of choice in during the following academic year.

An individual who applied for two distinct courses in unrelated subject areas complained about the handling of both applications and although neither complaint was not upheld, the student was offered the option of resubmitting a personal statement and participating in an interview for the first choice course or undertaking a programme of study at a lower level, commensurate with existing qualifications and experience for the second choice subject area.

An applicant was notified that their reference was not satisfactory, as it was not a verifiable academic or professional reference. This was due to it originating from a Hotmail email address with a supporting mobile phone number, as opposed to a business email address/telephone number. When the applicant explained that the reference couldn't come from a business email due to the referee being furloughed as a result of COVID and having no access to their work computer/telephone line, it was agreed that under the circumstances of a global pandemic, more discretion should have been applied and the standard requirement for references to come from a business email address/telephone number waived. This feedback was used to inform improvements to how incoming Admissions correspondence is managed.

An individual was unhappy that having followed advice provided by Glasgow Clyde College staff to undertake an entry level qualification to prepare for HE level study, their application was rejected based on not having a suitable qualification. Investigation confirmed that the entry level qualification undertaken by the applicant at a different educational establishment, was not commensurate with the entry level qualification offered by Glasgow Clyde College. However given the applicant's experience, qualifications and personal statement, and the ambiguous advice they received about entry qualifications, a place was offered. Staff were also advised that when they are providing advice to applicants about potential preparatory courses, that they are more specific about which courses are acceptable.

A complaint was received about the interview process for one course and the complaint was not upheld, as the method used was standard for all interviewees to that programme. However detailed feedback was provided to the applicant regarding how they could improve performance to increase their chance of success during future interviews.

One student was provided with conflicting information during enrolment regarding requirements for fee waiver, resulting in them being mistakenly billed for fees. Online enrolment increased significantly, and from remote locations over a short period of time for 2020-21 due to the pandemic, and whilst the online process was largely successful, this was not the case for every student. Consequently, a full review of online enrolment commenced, with comments from students, staff and partners being sought and considered for future improvements and developments.

C3 Course Related

There were substantially more complaints in the **Course Related** category, with 36 complaints in 2020-21 compared with 13 last academic year. It is worth noting that a number of these related directly or indirectly to circumstances resulting from COVID lockdowns imposed by Scottish Government.

A significant number of complaints in the **Learning and Teaching** sub-category came from students completing typically practical based courses. Learners were disappointed that they could not undertake practical learning in the normal way, as a result of lockdown. Whilst our awarding bodies recognised this and allowed awarding of most qualifications based on staffs' professional judgement, it was acknowledged that there were key skills which could not be taught conventionally under the circumstances. A range of measures were put in place to try to minimise the impact, including offering enhanced online lessons with practical skills being demonstrated thus enabling students to attempt hands-on tasks remotely, providing additional visual demonstration materials on our VLE platform Canvas for students to access/rewatch at their own convenience, prioritising specific courses for face to face teaching when restrictions lifted, and additional teaching being timetabled for the following academic session to enable missed practical learning to take place.

In addition to missing practical learning, a number of students also raised concerns regarding dissatisfaction with the online models of learning being adopted as a result of the COVID related lockdown. Measures put in place included ensuring that learners were given access a variety of materials through Canvas, better signposting to necessary information required to facilitate assessment and coursework completion, providing clarity about learning requirements as part of induction, asking staff to be more responsive to queries from students regarding online learning concerns, and committing to increased class rep/student feedback activities to ensure learners were managing remote learning effectively.

One student raised an **Environment/Resources** concern over inaccuracies in online teaching resources, which were causing confusion whilst trying to learn from home. Upon receiving this feedback, the lecturer reviewed and updated materials immediately. Another student complained about not receiving a laptop and Wi-Fi from the College to enable more effective online study. The student was advised that a formal process must be followed by those wishing to receive IT support and the student was provided with instructions for making an application.

A few **Course Management** complaints came from students dissatisfied with the online nature of a course, as it was advertised with face to face teaching. COVID restrictions meant that the course was unable to operate as expected, hence the requirement to move entirely to an online delivery model. The students were offered a full refund, as well as a guaranteed place for the following academic year if online learning did not suit, and staff were reminded that where significant changes to course format are necessary, that this must be reflected in course marketing materials.

<u>C3 Course Related continued</u>

Another complaint in the Course Management sub-category arose due to lecturer uncertainty over what course content would be taught as a result of being in a lockdown situation. This issue was quickly resolved by clarifying with both the member of staff and class group that the entire content as defined by the SQA specification would be covered, albeit in a remote fashion.

There were a few complaints regarding lack of communication about/cover provided for long term staff absence or staff leaving the organisation. There was agreement that self-directed study must be one, but not the only option for such situations and that 1:1 support must also be accessible to leaners in the absence of the lead lecturer. In addition there was a commitment that when staff absence is necessary, that notification of/cover arrangements for this must be better communicated via a range of mechanisms including Canvas, student email, class text etc.

An evening course applicant was unhappy with a last minute change of venue for their course, to an alternate campus. An apology was offered for the late change and a full refund was offered, should it not be possible for the complainant to undertake the course at the alternative location.

There were a number of complaints in the **Assessment, Exams and Certification** sub-category. One complainant raised concerns over receiving conflicting information about assessment submission deadlines, as well as a delay in some students receiving their graded unit result, when others in the group had been informed of their grade. It was established that technical difficulties encountered by members of the teaching team at the start of lockdown meant that communication was not at the expected level, and an apology was offered for the negative impact of the mixed messaging. The team also agreed that for future reference, they would wait until all graded unit papers had been marked and internally verified before sharing any results.

A complainant expressed dissatisfaction with the time taken to provide assessment feedback to the class group, leading to anxiety over whether remediation would require being carried into a new block. It was acknowledged that there had been an unacceptable delay in the provision of assessment feedback in some subjects, which was promptly remedied. There was also commitment from staff to adopt a consistent approach to assessment feedback expectations across classes.

Another student complained about a delay in resulting one unit, which led to the entire class group failing to achieve their group award. When this was highlighted, it was immediately resolved, and the students resulted for the outstanding unit.

Similarly, two students were not fully certificated due to some incomplete units, which had been carried forward from the previous academic year. SQA permitted Colleges to make holistic judgements concerning group awards, where evidence generated in other units could be counted towards judgements about the whole course award. The complaints were quickly resolved, as evidence of competence was easily able to be identified for the incomplete units, which were in turn converted to pass results, allowing achievement of the group award.

C3 Course Related continued

Concerns were raised by a few students who were asked to attend College to undertake an assessment they felt could be completed online. Upon review, it was agreed that the planned arrangement did not consider individuals shielding due to COVID, therefore an alternative assessment was developed to support those in the vulnerable category who couldn't attend College.

A number of complaints were also received from learners who were confused over whether their National 5 qualification would be graded holistically, as opposed to being based on one final exam. Confusion may have arisen over the sharing of SQA's statement that *'The closer the internal evidence is to the standard, format and duration of the course assessment, the more reliable it should be'*. However, reassurance was given to all students that the College would be grading all national qualifications holistically; using a combination of class tests, formative work and internal exams.

A student complained about estimated national qualification results being submitted to an awarding body, despite their request for this not to happen. It was established that an administrative mistake led to this error, and administrative staff were subsequently retrained on the correct process for withdrawing candidates from national qualification courses.

C4 Services

The College was alerted to a **Finance** issue, with an outstanding course fee prohibiting a student from commencing the next level of study. It was ascertained that an administrative error resulted in an obsolete alert remaining against the student's record when the balance was no longer outstanding. The alert was immediately removed, and the student enrolled on their programme.

There were two complaints in the **Funding/Bursary** sub-category and whilst neither of these complaints was upheld, both were addressed. In one case it was explained to the complainant that the College must adhere to national policy set out by the Scottish Funding Council, which allows Bursary funding for a maximum of 3 years/129 weeks. As this threshold had been reached, the student was not eligible for Bursary funding in session 2020/21, however was afforded priority access to the College's Discretionary fund. The other complainant was unhappy with the request for additional documentation to be supplied to confirm eligibility for bursary funding. It was fully explained why the College required the evidence and following this, the necessary paperwork was provided, and the bursary award completed without further delay.

A complaint in the **Others** sub-category was received from a student using the College's Counselling service, who was unhappy with the requirement for data sharing due to their disclosure that they were already registered with the statutory sector. Investigation concluded that staff acted responsibly during this case, as it is policy to seek consent to ensure support provided by Glasgow Clyde College's service does not contradict primary care. It was however determined that since the complainant was able to misinterpret College Guidance, that there was room to review College documentation to establish whether wording could be amended for better clarity.

C4 Services continued

Another issue was highlighted in the **Others** sub-category, by a parent whose child returned from the College Nursery with soreness and redness on their hands and with the subsequent recording and reporting of this situation. The complaint was investigated, and it was established that repeat washing with antibacterial soap as a result of COVID guidance led to this issue, and that whilst staff had not acted unreasonably or negligently, there was an opportunity to reflect on existing protocols, particularly during the ongoing COVID crisis. As a consequence, staff changed routines to improve the experience of the children in their care, tightened their definitions of what constitutes an incident and improved the detail of their reporting mechanisms to parents. Specific actions taken included:

- Changing the handwashing routine.
- Clarifying the definition of an incident and training staff on this.
- Redesigning incident and accident forms to allow recording of more detail.
- Emailing parents with documentation to support verbal communication.
- Considering a translation service for forms, for parents whose first language isn't English.
- Creating the time and space to communicate more effectively with parents during COVID restrictions (e.g. longer supplementary phone calls and creation of a parents meeting room).
- Reviewing and evaluating the changes at the end of the first term.

C5 Facilities

There were no complaints handled in this category.

C6 Others

All complaints in the **Others** category came from students who were unhappy with teaching time being lost due to lecturer strikes. It was explained that the industrial action was being taken as the result of a national dispute, therefore Glasgow Clyde College management could do nothing locally to avert the action. However all complainants were given reassurance that the College would do everything in its power to make good any lost learning, including convening additional twilight or evening sessions, extending the end of the academic year or awarding units holistically based on other evidence, where feasible.

Indicator 2 - The total number of complaints received

Glasgow Clyde College considered a total of 81 complaints during the period 1 August 2020 to 13 July 2021 as follows:

	Number	%
Stage 1	63	77.8%
Stage 2	13	16.0%
Escalation	5	6.2%

The figures above show a negligible increase in the total number of complaints received, with 81 compared to 80 complaints handled during 2019-20. It should however be noted that the average number of complaints received in the three academic years preceding 2019-20, was 144, therefore the number of complaints received during both 2020-21 and 2019-20 are significantly reduced compared with earlier years. This may be in part attributable to the ongoing COVID crisis, leading to a reduced number of learners undertaking study on campus.

Stage 1 complaints accounted for 77.8% of overall complaints closed, which is very small increase of 0.2% on the previous year. 16.0% of complaints received were handled directly at Stage 2, which is up on the 12.5% dealt with at this stage during the 2019-20 academic year. Five complainants remained dissatisfied following Stage 1, therefore requested Escalation of their complaint to Stage 2, which accounts for the remaining 6.2% of complaints received, and is a slight improvement on last year's 7.5%.

Indicator 3 - The number and % of complaints at each stage, which were closed within the set timescales of five and 20 working days

	Number	%
Stage 1 complaints closed within 5 working days	52	82.5%
Stage 1 complaints not closed with 5 working days	11	17.5%
Stage 2 complaints closed within 20 working days	11	84.6%
Stage 2 complaints not closed within 20 working days	2	15.4%
Escalated complaints closed within 20 working days	4	80.0%
Escalated complaints not closed within 20 working days	1	20.0%

52 of the 63 complaints handled at Stage 1 were closed within five working days, which equates to 82.5%; marginally less than last year where 84.4% of complaints handled at Stage 1 were closed within the set timescale. 84.5% of complaints handled at Stage 2 met the 20 day target, which is a slight improvement on last year's 80.0%, however whilst 100% of Escalated complaints were closed within the set timescale of 20 days during 2019-20, the timescale was not met for one complainant this year, which accounted for 20% of Escalated complaints.

Indicator 4 - The average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage

	Working days	Working days
Stage 1	232	3.7
Stage 2	282	21.7
Escalated	101	20.2

There was a decrease in the average length of time taken to close Stage 1 complaints, from 4.3 working days to 3.7, which falls within SPSO's set timescale of five working days. However, unlike last academic year where all Escalated complaints were responded to within 20 working days, Escalated complaints took on average 20.2 working days to close during 2020-21, which is marginally outside the 20 day target. As with both 2019-20 and 2018-19, the average Stage 2 response time remained above the SPSO 20 day target at 21.7 days average largely due to one extremely complex complaint, which took 94 days to be fully investigated and responded to.

Indicator 5 - The outcome of complaints at each stage

*Resolved is a new complaint outcome, which was introduced when Glasgow Clyde College adopted SPSO's revised MCHP on 1 April 2021. A like for like comparison against previous years' figures is not possible due to the addition of this new outcome category.

	Number	%
Complaints *resolved at Stage 1	5	7.9%
Complaints upheld at Stage 1	28	44.5%
Complaints not upheld at Stage 1	30	47.6%
Complaints *resolved at Stage 2	1	7.7%
Complaints upheld at Stage 2	5	38.5%
Complaints not upheld at Stage 2	7	53.8%
Complaints *resolved after Escalation	0	0.0%
Complaints upheld after Escalation	2	40.0%
Complaints not upheld after Escalation	3	60.0%
Complaints *resolved at all stages	6	7.4%
Complaints upheld at all stages	35	43.2%
Complaints not upheld at all stages	40	49.4%

Indicator 6 - Raising awareness

Following adoption of the revised CHP in April 2021, a number of measures were taken to raise awareness, including:
- A staff campaign, which promoted the revised procedure via email and our VLE platform Canvas.
- A student campaign, driven by the Student Association (GCCSA), which promoted the revised procedure via email and social media.
- Publication of revised documentation on the College's public website, for easy access by members of the public.

In addition, a new area has been developed within the student Canvas site, with easy access to guidance and an online form to make it easier for students to make a complaint.

Indicator 7 - Staff training in complaint handling

Staff training on handling complaints is a fundamental principle of SPSO's MCHPs and our CHP states that *'Training on this procedure will be part of the induction process for all new staff. Refresher training will be provided for current staff on a regular basis'.* As there were significant revisions to the CHP in April 2021, an online course was developed to be undertaken by **all** Glasgow Clyde College employees via Canvas. This course has now been completed by a significant number of employees and continues to be promoted during staff Learning Days.

Indicator 8 - Customer satisfaction with the complaints process

The College welcomes feedback on responses to complaints, however the formal survey, normally administered to gather complainant feedback, was suspended during the 2021-21 academic year. Despite this, informal feedback was received from 22 complainants and was mainly positive with statements including; *'Thank you so much for all your support', 'Appreciated the call to discuss the complaint', 'I must compliment everyone who has managed to input varying responses during the current difficulties', 'I appreciate you getting in touch and reaffirming your support', 'Many thanks for your prompt response, I appreciate your assistance resolving this matter', 'Thanks for the meeting and for all your help with this situation, this has addressed all my concerns and I am happy with the outcome', 'Thanks again for all your help', 'Thank you for acknowledging my complaint and for looking to addressing my concerns with the appropriate persons', 'I feel the issue is now being addressed', 'I am glad my complaint was insightful and has encouraged you to take steps', 'I appreciate your time and efforts for looking into my complaint' 'Thank you so much for your response! I feel much more confident now going forward'.*

Whilst little informal negative feedback was received, two complainants remained unhappy with the College's final response to their complaints, therefore asked SPSO to review their cases. SPSO did not take either complaint forward, as they felt College responses were in both cases were appropriate. Another complainant who was dissatisfied contacted their MSP.

The formal 'Complaint Handling Process Feedback' survey has been reintroduced for the 2021-22 academic year.

Appendix 1 - Complaints by Category – 2020-21 vs 2019-20
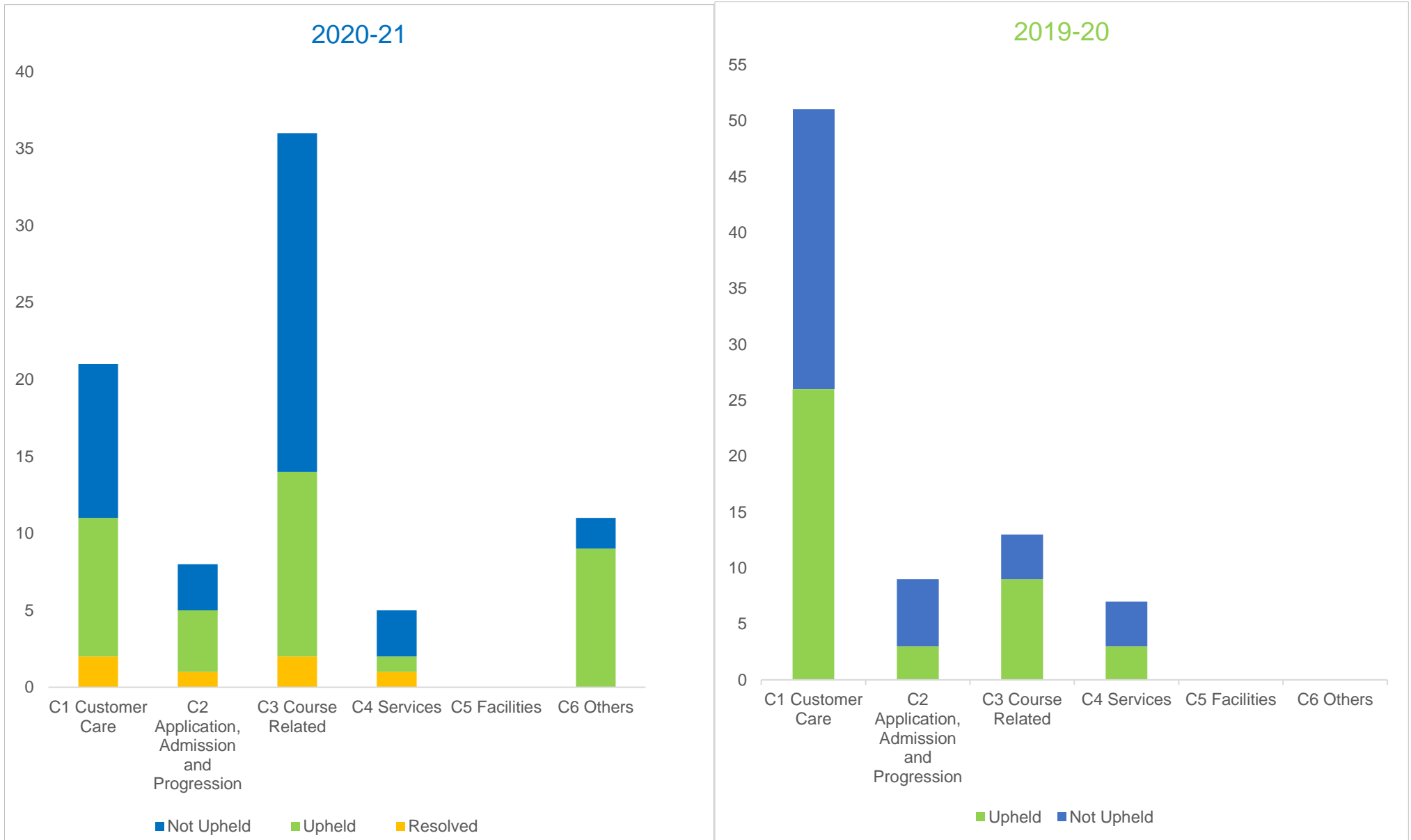
Appendix 2 - Complaints by Sub-category - 2020-21