

Complaints Handling Procedure Annual Summary 2015-16

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1. Introduction

The Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act gave the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) a role in creating standard complaints procedures for each sector under their jurisdiction. This places a number of extended duties on the college, including the recording of all complaints and a requirement to publish regular statistics and produce this annual report.

Feedback is a key component of the college quality framework and analysis of complaints is part of a suite of measures which includes surveys, focus groups, local level questionnaires, audit, curriculum meetings and Student Association activities which contribute to providing evidence and information which is used to improve processes, enhance learner engagement and drive up quality.

This is the third annual summary of complaints activity for Glasgow Clyde College. Results below are based on complaints handled through Procedure 7.2.5 Complaints Handling.

2. Performance Indicators

Total number of complaints received and complaints received per 100 population		
Number of complaints received	153	
Number of complaints received per 100 population as a %	1.1%	
Number of complaints closed at each stage and as a % of complaints closed		
Number of complaints closed at Stage 1 and % of total closed	114	74.5%
Number of complaints closed at Stage 2 and % of total closed	27	17.7%
Number of complaints closed after Escalation and % of total closed	12	7.8%
Number of complaints upheld and not upheld at each stage and as a % at each stage		
Stage 1		
Number and % of complaints upheld at Stage 1	48	42.1%
Number and % of complaints not upheld at Stage 1	66	57.9%
Stage 2		
Number and % of complaints upheld at Stage 2	14	51.9%
Number and % of complaints not upheld at Stage 2	13	48.1%
Escalated		
Number and % of complaints upheld after Escalation	5	41.7%
Number and % of complaints not upheld after Escalation	7	58.3%
Total working days and average time in working days to close complaints at each stage		
Total working days / ave. time in working days to close complaints at Stage 1	533	4.7
Total working days / ave. time in working days to close complaints at Stage 2	536	19.9
Total working days / ave. time in working days to close complaints after escalation	250	20.8
Number and % of complaints closed within set timescales		
Number and % of Stage 1 complaints closed within 5 working days	86	75.4%
Number and % of Stage 1 complaints not closed with 5 working days	28	24.6%
Number and % of Stage 2 complaints closed within 20 working days	16	59.3%
Number and % of Stage 2 complaints not closed within 20 working days	11	40.7%
Number and % of Escalated complaints closed within 20 working days	8	66.7%
Number and % of Escalated complaints not closed within 20 working days	4	33.3%

2. Performance Indicators continued

Number and % of complaints closed at each stage where extensions have been authorised		
Number and % of Stage 1 complaints closed within 10 working days (ext.)	25	89.3%
Number and % of Stage 1 complaints not closed within 10 working days (ext.)	5	17.9%
Number and % of Stage 2 complaints closed within 40 working days (ext.)	11	100.0%
Number and % of Stage 2 complaints not closed within 40 working days (ext.)	0	0.0%
Number and % of Escalated complaints closed within 40 working days (ext.)	4	100.0%
Number and % of Escalated complaints not closed within 40 working days (ext.)	0	0.0%

Overall there were 153 complaints handled during the period 1 August 2015 to 31 July 2016. The average number of complaints per month for 2015-16 was 12.8 versus 13.5 for 2014-15, which demonstrates slightly fewer expressions of dissatisfaction this academic year.

Of the 153 complaints received, 114 (74.5%) were dealt with at Stage 1. Of the 114 complaints, 42.1% were upheld which is a decrease on 59.0% upheld during 2014-15. The average time taken to respond to Stage 1 complaints was 4.7 days, which is below the 5 day target requested by SPSO, and is an improvement on the average 6.1 days seen in 2014-15.

The remaining 39 complaints (25.5%) were dealt with at Stage 2; 12 of these having been escalated from Stage 1. Of the 39 complaints, 48.7% were upheld in comparison with 43.7% upheld during 2014-15. The overall average time taken to respond to Stage 2 complaints was 20.2 days, which is slightly above the 20 day SPSO target however an improvement on the average 24.6 days of 2014-15.

3. Complaints by Category

One aim of the external Complaints Handling Advisory Group during 2015-16, was sector wide standardisation when categorising complaints. This resulted in adoption of a standard set of categories / subcategories for complaints in the College sector as follows:

Main Category	Subcategories
Customer Care	Health and Safety, Security, Diversity and Equality, Data Protection, Environmental, Staff Conduct and Student Conduct
Applications, Admission and Progression	Marketing, Application, Admission Interview, Enrolment, Induction, Progression, Articulation and Withdrawal
Course Related	Learning & Teaching, Resources, Course Management, Facilitated Learning & Support, Assessment, Exams and Certification
Services	Finance, Funding / Bursary, Student Records, Providing Learning Support, Library / Learning Technology and Quality
Facilities	Catering, Student Accommodation, Maintenance, Lifts and Car Parking

A breakdown of complaints received in each main category is shown below:

Category	No. of Complaints	Upheld	Not Upheld
Customer Care	49	24	25
Applications, Admission and Progression	34	10	24
Course Related	43	24	19
Services	10	2	8
Facilities	8	7	1
Others	9*	0	9
	153	67	86

*All nine complaints in the 'Others' category related to teaching staff Industrial Action.

4. Lessons learned and actions taken to improve services

<p>Customer Care</p> <p>Many upheld complaints arose from neighbours complaining about lack of student respect for areas surrounding the college grounds. As a result, the college engaged with Glasgow City Council litter wardens, highlighted the issue on social media and reinforced the Student Code of Conduct. The college will continue to highlight the message concerning respect for college neighbours throughout the coming academic year.</p> <p>Some complaints upheld in this category related to the communication style of staff towards students and these were mainly resolved quickly through personal apologies.</p> <p>A few complaints upheld resulted from issues experienced by individuals attempting to contact the college via telephone, whilst work was being undertaken to merge the three legacy college telephony systems. Work continues towards establishing a single telephony system for Glasgow Clyde College.</p>
<p>Applications, Admission and Progression</p> <p>Most complaints upheld in this category related to dissatisfaction with the admissions process. This process involves staff in an Admissions Unit who arrange interviews, and administration and teaching staff in Faculties who advise of interview decisions and offer places. The majority of complaints arose from poor or slow communication from the college and as a result work was carried out to improve communication processes. This included increasing the amount of information available on the website, working with Faculties to reduce the number of applications on hold for extended periods, reviews of the interview processes used in a few areas and the implementation of more regular checks of administrative processes. Problems were exacerbated in the period from January to June 2016 by higher than usual levels of staff absence in both Faculty Administration and Admissions, which led to backlogs in processing in areas with high volumes of applications. The college is currently working with an Admissions group and with Senior Lecturers to seek further solutions in improving processing.</p> <p>Other complaints resulted from disappointment with admissions decisions and were generally resolved by further explanation of college policies, in a few cases by offering a further interview for an alternative course or where available, a place on the course if the applicants' complaint had been upheld.</p>

Course Related
<p>There was a common theme within this category, relating to the level and quality of teaching experienced by students within one School. This department suffered significant staffing issues throughout the academic year and several long term absences by key teaching staff which necessitated recruitment and interviewing of several part time temporary staff at short notice.</p> <p>This resulted in timetabling issues, class cancellations and insufficient time to fully mentor and support cover being provided by interim staff. To address problems additional staff were recruited longer term and extra tuition was provided by experienced lecturers from sister campuses. In addition re-timetabling took place and the course length was extended to ensure students were able to complete the programme successfully. A plan has been put in place by Senior Management to ensure this issue does not continue into 2016-17.</p>
Services
<p>Only two complaints were upheld in this category. One complaint related to the College failing to ensure that courses eligible for ILA funding were updated on the ILA website, and a process has now been put in place to ensure that ILA information is updated in a more timely manner.</p> <p>The other upheld complaint related to a breach of data protection. The complaint occurred as a result of human error and as a result staff have been reminded to take more care and double check information before it is released to a third party.</p>
Facilities
<p>The main theme of complaints upheld in this category regarded contractors working noisily on College grounds during unsociable hours. The Head of Estates now issues instructions to all contractors at commencement of service that work must only take place within regulated hours to ensure minimal disruption to local residents. As policy, it has been decided that contractors who contravene these instructions will have this taken into consideration when further contracts are being negotiated.</p>

The college follows up on complainant satisfaction with the complaints process by sending out a follow up survey. In 2015-2016 153 emails were sent out and there were 33 responses (22%). Overall 97% of respondents were aware of the complaints procedure and 82% found it easy to make a complaint. 70% were satisfied with the time taken to investigate their complaint and 73% felt they were dealt with courteously at all times. However only 55% felt that their complaint was thoroughly investigated, 61% agreed that the response received addressed the content of their complaint and only 50% were able to access assistance in making their complaint.

Further analysis of these results identifies that:

- Complainants are more likely to respond when their complaint is not upheld
- Complainants are more likely to express dissatisfaction when their complaint is not upheld

Nevertheless, there is room for improvement in raising awareness of the support available to assist the complainant when making a complaint and further staff development in responding fully to complaints.

SPSO have developed a Complaints Performance Self- Assessment Tool to support public sector bodies in identifying areas of strength and for improvement and the college has adopted the first stage of this tool by carrying out an audit of the college procedure, accompanied by a relevant action plan. This illustrates college commitment to reflect and review performance, as well as intent to strengthen the process going forward. Complaints are discussed at senior management level on a quarterly basis and quarterly results and the annual summary are published on the college website.

5. Conclusions

Strengths

- The college employs a robust system to record and monitor complaints which meets legislative and SPSO requirements.
- Complaints are assigned appropriately by Complaints Handlers (Quality Co-ordinators) and written responses are monitored prior to issue.
- Support and advice for those responding to complaints is available through the Quality team and staff development sessions.
- Efforts are made to learn lessons from complaints both at local and college level and there is evidence of changes in processes arising from complaints.
- Internal audit is used to identify areas for improvement and results and reports are published on the college website.

Areas for Improvement

- Not all complaints are dealt with in the recommended time frames and complaints handlers waste a good deal of time and effort in distributing reminders, sometimes several times.
- Further staff development is required to improve the standard of responses, particularly written responses, to ensure that they address all of the issues raised.
- Further analysis is required to identify lessons learned at organisational level. In some cases, even though the complaint is resolved satisfactorily, it can arise again in another area or at another time and we can improve dissemination of good practice to learn from this.