



Learning and Teaching Committee

Date of Meeting	Tuesday 6th February 2018
Paper No.	LTC3-G
Agenda Item	11
Subject of Paper	SPSO Annual Complaint Handling Report – Academic Year 2016/17
FOISA Status	Disclosable
Primary Contact	Douglas Dickson, Performance and Improvement Director
Date of production	29th January 2018
Action	For Information

1. Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

2. Purpose of report

This report presents College complaints for academic year 2016/17.

3. Context and Discussion

We previously signed to the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO) Further Education Complaint Handling Procedure. In accordance with this procedure we are required to publish our performance in the resolution of complaints.

The College takes each complaint received and assigns a Complaint Investigation Manager to identify the cause of the complaint and to provide a resolution to the complainant. Through this process we identify the lessons learnt in resolving complaints and also the improvements that we should make to the process, Faculty or Service department.

In accordance with the procedure the target for resolution of Stage 1 complaints is 5 days and Stage 2 complaints 20 days. In 2016/17 the average days to close a Stage 1 complaint was 4.5 days and Stage 2 18.8 days.

We continue to publish our complaints to our Website as required by SPSO.

4. Impact and implications

The resolution and lessons learnt from complaints provide opportunity for the College to enhance the student experience.



Complaints Handling Procedure

Annual Report 2016/17 (01 Aug 2016 to 31 July 2017)

Draft : 11th January 2018

Contents

1. Performance Indicators P1-P6 (quantitative measures)
2. Performance Indicator P7: Customer Satisfaction
3. Performance Indicator P8: Learning from Complaints

1 Performance Indicators: P1-P6

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS		2016/17		2015/16	
1.0	Total number of complaints received & complaints received per 100 population				
	Number of complaints Received	222		153	
	College Population and Number of Complaints received per 100 population	25000	0.9	25000	0.6
2.0	Number of complaints closed at each stage and as a % of all complaints closed				
	Number of complaints closed at Stage 1 and % of total closed	188	84.7%	115	75.2%
	Number of complaints closed at Stage 2 and % of total closed	22	9.9%	28	18.3%
	Number of Complaints closed after Escalation and % of total closed	12	5.4%	10	6.5%
	Open	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
3.0	Number of Complaints upheld and not upheld at each stage as a % of complaints closed at that stage				
	Stage 1				
	Number and % of complaints upheld at Stage 1	140	74.5%	74	64.3%
	Number and % of complaints not upheld at Stage 1	48	25.5%	41	35.7%
	Stage 2				

	Number and % of complaints upheld at Stage 2	11	50.0%	12	42.9%
	Number and % of complaints not upheld at Stage 2	11	50.0%	16	57.1%
	Escalated				
	Number and % of complaints upheld after Escalation	7	58.3%	4	40.0%
	Number and % of complaints not upheld after Escalation	5	41.7%	6	60.0%
4.0	Total working days and average time in working days to close complaints at each stage				
	Total working days and average time in working days to close complaints at Stage 1	847	4.5	471	4.1
	Total working days and average time in working days to close complaints at Stage 2	413	18.8	549	19.6
	Total working days and average time in working days to close complaints after Escalation	258	21.5	149	14.9
5.0	Number and % of complaints closed within set timescales (S1=5 working days; S2=20 working days ; Escalated = 20 working days)				
	Number and % of Stage 1 complaints closed within 5 working days	144	76.6%	99	86.1%
	Number and % of Stage 1 complaints not closed with 5 working days	44	23.4%	16	13.9%
	Number and % of Stage 2 complaints closed within 20 working days	15	68.2%	16	57.1%
	Number and % of Stage 2 complaints not closed within 20 working days	7	31.8%	126	42.9%
	Number and % of Escalated complaints closed within 20 working days	8	66.7%	9	90.0%
	Number and % of Escalated complaints not closed within 20 working days	4	33.3%	1	10.0%
6.0	Number and % of complaints closed at each stage where extensions have been authorised				
	Number and % of Stage 1 complaints closed within 10 working days (extension)	39	88.6%	11	68.7%
	Number and % of Stage 1 complaints not closed within 10 working days (extension)	5	11.4%	5	31.2%
	Number and % of Stage 2 complaints closed within 40 working days (extension)	7	100.0%	10	83.3%
	Number and % of Stage 2 complaints not closed within 40 working days (extension)	0	0.0%	2	16.7%
	Number and % of Escalated complaints closed within 40 working days (extension)	4	100.0%	1	100.0%
	Number and % of Escalated complaints not closed within 40 working days (extension)	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

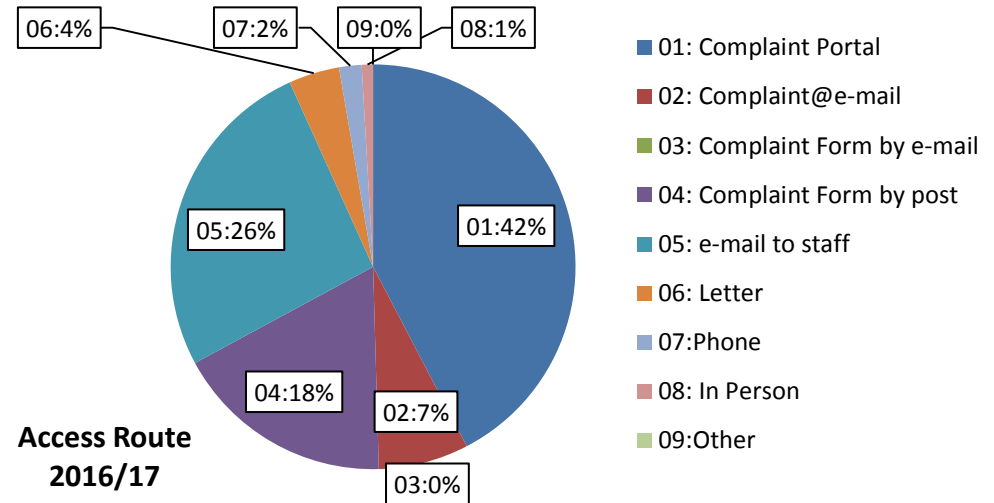
PI	Key Observations
1.0	The College received 222 complaints in 2016/17 compared with 153 the previous year representing an increase of 45%.
2.0	An increase in the number of complaints handled at Stage 1 (see Notes)
3.0	An increase in the number of complaints upheld across all Stages with the overall figure increasing to 71% compared with 59% for the previous year.
4.0	Average Stage 1 and Stage 2 response times were within their respective target while average response times for Escalated complaints has increased from 15 working days to 21.5 working days
5.0	The number of Stage 1 complaints closed out within the 5 working days of target has fallen from 86 % to 77%.
6.0	50 out of 55 (90%)complaints requiring an extension where closed out within target compared with 22 out of 29 (75%) previous year
Notes	A total of 45 complaints were received regarding the national industrial dispute in Scotland's College. This spike in complaints influenced a number of the PIs and without them the % increase in the number of complaints on the previous year would have been 16%. All of these complaints were handled at Stage 1.

2 Performance Indicator P7: Customer Satisfaction

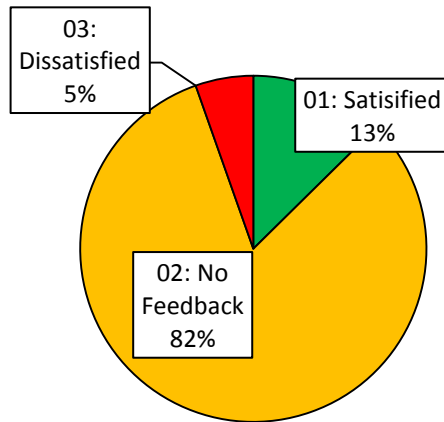
2.1 Access to Complaint Handling Procedure

Through our “City Listens” process the College provides an on-line Complaint Portal to raise complaints and also a dedicated e-mail address. Complaint Forms are also available in hard copy or electronic format which can be posted or e-mailed. All these routes are handled by members of the Performance Team who quickly identify the most appropriate member of staff to handle the complaint. Other routes include e-mailing staff directly, letter, phone or ‘in person’.

The on-line complaint portal and direct e-mail to staff remain the most popular routes of access to the Complaint Handling Procedure.



Customer Feedback 2016/17



2.2 Feedback

The College requests feedback on the responses to complaints and categorises feedback as "Satisfied", "Dissatisfied" and "No Feedback". The College also evaluates feedback against the complaint outcome of 'Upheld' or 'Not Upheld'

Feedback from customers has decreased to 18% compared with 23% in the previous year, including from those customers expressing satisfaction decreasing to 20% from 13%.

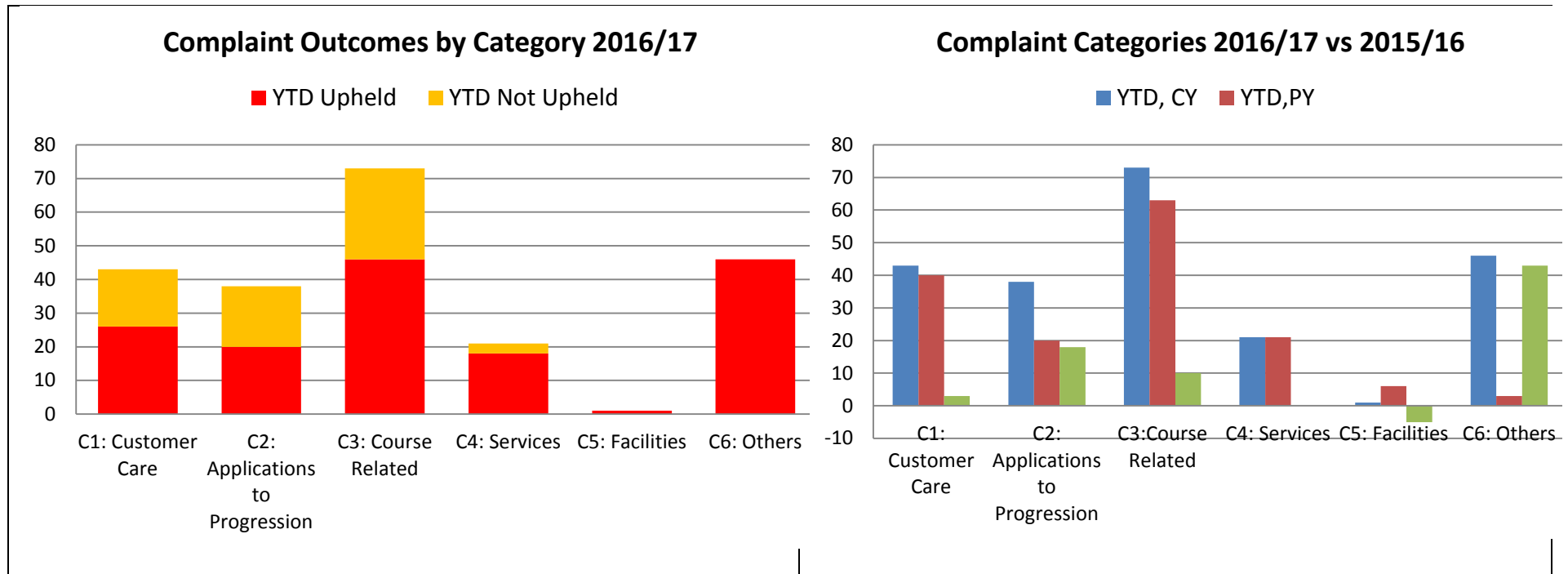
3 Performance Indicator P8: Learning from Complaints

3.1 Complaint Reporting

Complaint Reports are prepared Monthly and Quarterly for the purpose of review by the College's Senior Management Team and Executive Leadership Team. The Quarterly Reports are published on the College web-site. An Annual Complaint Report is prepared for the purpose of review by the College's Senior Management Team and Executive Leadership Team and approval by the College Board for publishing to the College web-site.

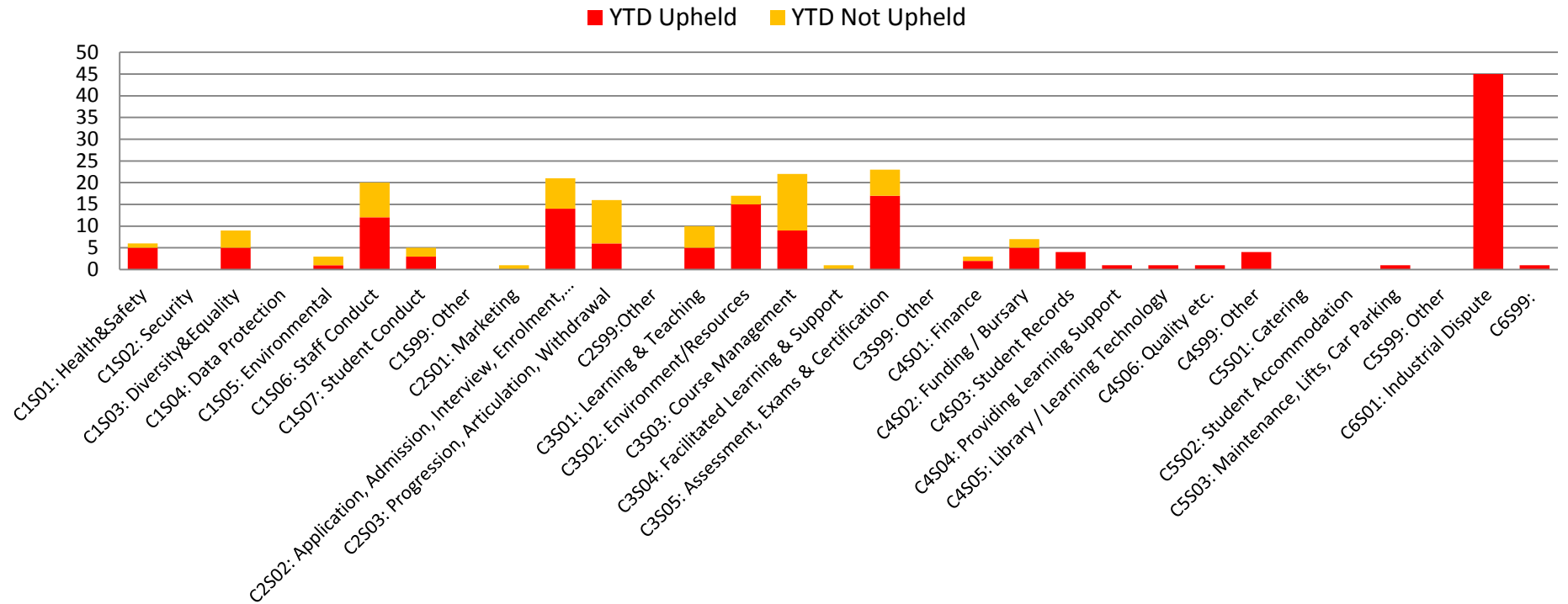
3.2 Complaints Received by Category and Complaint Outcomes

The College has adopted the standardised Complaint Categories and sub-Categories developed by the College Development Network's Complaint Handling Advisory Group. Complaints received in 2015/16 were re-assigned accordingly to allow a comparison with 2016/17.



3.3 Complaint Outcomes by Sub-Category

Complaint Outcomes by Sub-Category 2016/17



2016/17	Customer Care	43 (19%)	Applications to Progression	38 (17%)	Course Related	73 (33%)	Services	21 (9%)	Facilities	1 (1%)	Others	46 (21%)
2016/17	Customer Care	43	Applications to Progression	38	Course Related	73	Services	21	Facilities	1	Others	1 (0.5%)

17*	er Care	(24%)	to Progression	(21%)	Related	(42%)	es	(11%)		(1%)		
2015/ 16	Custom er Care	40 (25%)	Applications to Progression	20 (13%)	Course Related	63 (41%)	Servic es	21 (14%)	Facilities	6 (4%)	Others	3 (2%)

2016/17* represents complaints received in current year excluding national industrial dispute complaints

3.4 Complaint Themes, Learning from Complaints and Improvement to Services

The College received 222 complaints in 2016/17 compared with 153 in the previous year which represents an increase of 45%. This increase was fuelled by complaints associated with the move to the new City Campus at the beginning of the academic session and later in the academic session by complaints associated with the national industrial dispute in Scotland's colleges.

CUSTOMER CARE

The College received 43 complaints in this category of which 26 were upheld.

Several of the complaints in this category were associated with the move into the new City Campus at the start of the academic session while some of these complaints shared the common theme of individuals choosing to behave in a way without consideration for others at the College or our neighbours.

The No Smoking Policy for the new campus had not been fully developed at the time of the opening of the campus and although No Smoking signs were clearly visible at the entrances some people were choosing to ignore them. Although three complaints from students subjected to passive smoking have been upheld this number does not reflect the scale of the problem as staff have

to regularly police the entrances to move smokers on. The College recognises that the 'No Smoking Policy' requires to be further developed and staff and student awareness of the policy enhanced to ensure that compliance is improved. In conjunction with these actions a number of health and well-being initiatives such as the "Clear the Air Campaign" are being well supported by students.

Complaints were received regarding some drivers parking in disabled parking spaces at the City Campus without 'blue badge'. A barrier was introduced to enable Estates staff to carry out checks before permission to park was granted.

Residents neighbouring to the City Campus complained about students parking in residents' private spaces. Although the individual students could not be identified, statements requesting students "to respect our neighbours and not park in their spaces" have been included in the College web-site and on banners shown regularly on the College TV screens as well as being written into the Student Agreements (joining instructions) for Academic Session 2017/18. Residents also complained of anti-social behaviour of some students. Community Police intervened and explained the possible consequences of their actions. Later the College arranged for the police officers (not in uniform) to visit the College and discuss the impact and the consequences of anti-social behaviour.

Snagging faults with an accessible hoist and accessible door caused disruption to students' access to the City campus at the start of the session. Although these were fixed the problem with the door resurfaced later in the year. A probable root cause was identified as 'greater use than expected' and a sign placed on the door identifying it as a 'priority entrance for those with access needs' and the door closure mechanism replaced with a heavier duty closure. The door is checked daily by Estates staff and it is also scheduled for planned preventative maintenance.

A number of complaints received associated with situations which could have been handled better by staff or where customer service did not meet the required standard. Apologies were offered and where appropriate customer service training identified and provided by OD.

APPLICATION, ADMISSIONS, INTERVIEW, ENROLMENT, PROGRESSION, WITHDRAWAL, ARTICULATION

The College received 38 complaints in this category of which 20 were upheld.

Applications, Admissions, Interview, Enrolment

In academic session 2016/17 the College received 23,000 applications from students for a place on course that they identify as their 1st choice through an on-line application system. Each application is assessed by Admissions team against 'minimum entry requirements' for the course and a decision made to either (a) invite the applicant for interview by Curriculum staff (b) refer to Curriculum staff for decision to invite for interview or not, or (c) notify that applicant that they have been unsuccessful.

A number of complaints were received from applicants that had been invited for interview only to be told that they did not meet the 'minimum entry requirement' for the course and in order to not to waste any more of their time and progress interviews of those applicants that met the requirements they were asked to leave. Investigation revealed that the applicants applications had either not been referred to the Curriculum area or Curriculum area had not reviewed the applications; otherwise the applicants would not have been invited for interview. In most cases as an outcome of the complaint the applicants were invited to meet with Curriculum staff to discuss their career aspirations and a place was offered on an alternative and more appropriate course. For those applicants that did not want to consider alternative courses apologies and a reimbursement of travelling expenses etc. were offered. Greater care and attention will be taken by Admissions and Curriculum staff to ensure that expectations are not raised through sending invitations to candidates unsuitable for the course.

An applicant reported a fault with the on-line application system. The fault was quickly fixed and staff accepted that the questioning of the applicant to determine the nature of the fault could have been handled better and an apology offered. Staff also recognised that the application of another applicant could have been handled better after an initial misunderstanding leading to the applicant being offered a place on a course that they had applied for.

Complaints from two applicants that were currently completing courses at other Colleges helped identify specific situations for Admissions and Curriculum staff to be mindful of when considering applicants qualifications against 'minimum entry requirements'. Namely, where an applicant is applying for a place on 2nd Year HND course (a system has now been put in place that clearly identifies these students) and where an applicant has passed 'College certificated units' in addition to SQA units, which may not have been divulged in their application.

Two applicants complained about the Interview feedback process. One regarding the lack of feedback despite several requests and staff were reminded to adhere to the record keeping requirements of the College's "Interviewer Guide and Checklist". The other regarding the manner of feedback which was considered to be disrespectful where an apology was offered and reassurance given that it was not the intent to be disrespectful

Withdrawal from Course, Progression & Graduation

The main source of complaints in this sub-category was associated with the application of the Student Absence and Withdrawal procedure. The dates of the last attendance of two students that had chosen to withdraw from their course were incorrectly recorded and triggered a request for fees that were not due. Apologies were offered and the students refunded accordingly. A student complained that they never received any communication from the College notifying them that they had been withdrawn from the course due to continued poor attendance and was shocked to receive an invoice for outstanding fees. Investigation revealed the College had not kept a record of the notification as required by the procedure. An apology was offered and the fees were waived accordingly. The procedure is currently under review and staff training on the revised procedure will highlight that administrative errors can result in students being placed in the stressful situation of receiving invoices for fees that are not due.

COURSE RELATED

The College received 73 complaints in this category of which 46 were upheld.

This category is dominated with complaints associated with the move into the new City Campus at the start of the academic session.

Learning & Teaching

Five complaints were upheld associated with teaching style and these were addressed with solutions that met with the approval of the students.

Environment & Resources

Specialist craft workshops and radio studio snagged meant that units delivery sequences were revised. Class Representatives played a pro-active role in expressing the dissatisfaction of their class mates through the Complaint Handling Procedure. Apologies

were given for the delays and the Faculty Director took the lead in ensuring regular communication with the students to update them on progress against revised timescales for the workshops to be ready and contingency plans for making up lost class time.

A Class Representative raised a complaint regarding the use of new open space classrooms and classroom sizes at City Campus. The College took the opportunity to put into context the number of open space classrooms in the new campus. It is also recognised that this environment was more suited to some courses than others and guidance was given to Curriculum areas timetabling classes.

Other complaints included lack of facilities to store material and suitable locations were identified to install lockers.

As part of the learning process all complaints received on the new City Campus are shared with the Infrastructure team to form part of the review of the City Campus.

Course Management

Four complaints were upheld about disruption to classes when the College fine-tuned the timetabling system to make the best use of the space in the new City Campus that was suitable for all parties. Apologies were offered and reassurance given that the disruption was temporary and that the class work would not suffer.

A student complained of finding their course difficult since it included a class that had to be carried over from the previous academic session due to staff shortages. A support plan was quickly put in place to the student's satisfaction. Two other complaints were upheld as a consequence of disruption to class time due to unforeseen staff absences. One of these took a time to resolve while specialised Bank staff was recruited and the other resulted in the curriculum area reviewing processes to ensure Bank staff are better prepared to pick up existing lesson plans.

Assessments

Three complaints were upheld associated with the timing of Internal Verification (quality assurance) of assessments. These were immediately addressed for the specific cases and lessons learnt will be taken forward into the Curriculum Areas Internal Verification plans for 2017/18.

Three complaints were upheld associated with the delay in marking assessments and providing feedback from assessments and the impact this had on the timing of re-sits. Staff were reminded of the need to follow assessment guidelines and the scheduling of re-sits will be changed to reduce the number at the end of an academic session.

A student complained that long standing issues with equipment used for practical work were not taken into account when marking assessments. The assessments were reviewed and marks adjusted. The assessment unit has been updated.

Examinations

Eight complaints were upheld regarding examination conditions in the new City Campus including noise from the adjoining drama class, white noise from within the exam room and very cold conditions. Timetabling of classes vs. examinations was changed to address any potential conflict and the issues of white noise and cold temperatures resolved.

Certification

A student complained that the processing of course fees, registration and the processing of results were unnecessarily delayed which resulted in certification still not having taken place almost two months since the course finished. Apologies were offered for an administrative error which resulted in the student being attached to the wrong SQA Group award.

Services

The College received 21 complaints in this category of which 18 were upheld.

Finance

A student enrolled on a course expecting to pay the fees as advertised on the College web-site and on-line Prospectus only to be informed later that these were the fees per unit (3 units per course). The student took the matter up with Finance and complained that no one responded and requested that the College honour the fees as advertised. Apologies were offered for the poor customer service and the misleading information and a reduction in fees offered, which the student considered unacceptable. The

College web-site and prospectus for 2017/18 has been modified accordingly to prevent any similar misunderstandings. The College also accepted that the complaint could have been handled in a more constructive manner.

Payment to a service provider had been delayed in light of the IR35 tax legislation. Payment was made and apologies offered..

Funding / Bursary

Three complaints were upheld regarding the processing of Individual Learning Account (ILA). Clerical errors resulted in students being invoiced for fees they did not owe. Apologies were offered and refunds given and greater care will be taken in future to ensure student correspondence is re-directed to the appropriate department.

Student Records

Two complaints were upheld regarding maintenance of student records. The first involved contact details which the student complained were not current and although these had been updated on the College system the final step of verification had been overlooked. The second involved student cards where the expiry date pre-dated the end of the course. The expiry date was re-set and new cards printed and a review of the student feedback process will be carried out to ensure that some of the issues raised can be quickly addressed.

Providing Learning Support

The College was unable to provide a chair suitable for student's needs within a reasonable timescale and thereby impacted on student's learning experience and attendance. The College apologised and the student now has a dedicated chair that meets their needs.

Actions from Complaints

A Student complained that the College had not implemented the actions agreed from a previous complaint upheld in May 2017. There was confusion over who was responsible for following up the agreed actions with each party thinking the other had carried them out. These have now been followed through and an internal audit of the Complaint Handling Procedure scheduled for 2017/18.

Others

Three complaints were upheld from clients of the College's in-house Beauty Salon regarding difficulties in booking appointments due to staff availability. Apologies were offered and in one case an alternative appointment was booked free of charge.

Facilities

The College received 1 complaints which was upheld.

(N.B. note a number of complaints associated with Facilities – e.g. accessible doors fall under the category of Customer Care.

Student identified that classrooms and staircases in the new City Campus were unbearably hot. The Facilities Management Team quickly adjusted with the Building Management System to ensure an appropriate temperature.

Others

The College received 46 complaints in this category of which 45 were associated with the national industrial dispute.

Industrial Dispute

College received 45 complaints (several of these from class representatives on behalf of their classes regarding the national industrial dispute across Scotland's College which the College's failure to resolve the dispute, the impact on the learning experience and concerns over completing and passing courses., The College put in place processes to keep students informed throughout the dispute while the College remained open for self-study purposes. Following the resolution of the dispute the academic session was extended and additional classes arranged.