



**Working Together**

# **Complaints Handling Report 2019/20**

**July 2020**

## Executive Summary

The annual Complaints Handling Report analyses our performance in handling complaints effectively, resolving complaints quickly and identifying areas for improvement when our service is found to be below expectations.

Our complaints handling procedure meets the requirements of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) model complaints handling procedure and complies with the requirements of the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010.

The complaints handling procedure allows for two levels of complaints handling. Frontline resolution (Level 1) empowers all staff to deal with complaints at the point of contact quickly and effectively. The vast majority of complaints are resolved at this level. Where complaints are more serious or cannot be resolved at the frontline, these are investigated fully (Level 2) with a designated college manager leading the investigation. In all cases we look to learn from the complaint and examine ways it can improve the quality of our service as a consequence.

## **2019/20 Complaints**

This report covers the period July 2019 to June 2020. In that period, there were thirty-two frontline complaints (Level 1) and three complaints requiring a full investigation (Level 2). In all cases but three, the complainants were satisfied with the outcome. In two of these cases the complaints were not upheld. In the third case the complaint was escalated to Level 2 and the complainant was satisfied with the outcome of the full investigation. No complainant took unresolved complaints to the SPSO.

### **Frontline (Level 1) complaints**

We aim to resolve complaints quickly and close to where we provided the service. This could mean an 'on the spot' apology and explanation if something has clearly gone wrong and immediate action taken to resolve the problem.

During the period 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020 twenty-four of the thirty-two frontline complaints received were resolved within our target timescale of five working days. A further seven complaints were not resolved within five working days; however only two of these had sought and been granted an extension. The remaining Level 1 complaint was escalated to Level 2 for further investigation.

Fourteen of the complaints were upheld, two were partially upheld and sixteen were not upheld. We continue to make changes to the way in which we do things as a result of some of these complaints. Often changes have been specific to a programme or service, generally involving the attention to detail in implementing existing policy and procedures. These also include organisation and delivery of specific programmes; student behaviour and discipline; improving information about specific courses or funding; referral for learning support, and improvements to communication with students.

The number of Level 1 complaints dealt with in the year was higher than the previous year's total, increasing from fifteen complaints in 2018/19 to

thirty-two in 2019/20 (Table 1). This increase could be attributable to renewed awareness raising of the complaints handling procedure within the College during this academic year. Once again, the vast majority of complaints were from students, with complaints from parents being the next largest category. Where a complaint against a student or staff member was upheld, an apology was issued and the cause of the complaint and subsequent behaviour discussed to assist the individual in managing issues better in the future.

We recognise that we can improve our administration of complaints handling further and aim to eliminate situations where the time to deal with a complaint exceeds the allotted time without an extension of time being considered.

We have also implemented a system whereby the Senior Leadership Team within the College provide an update on actions planned or taken to resolve the complaints and avoid recurrence.

### **Investigation (Level 2) complaints**

Investigation (Level 2) complaints are those which we have not been able to resolve at the frontline, or complaints which are complex and require more detailed investigation. We aim to acknowledge receipt of Level 2 complaints within three working days and give a full response to the complainant within twenty working days. We received one complaint that was dealt with immediately at Level 2 because of its complexity and need for detailed investigation; this complaint was partially upheld. The other two Level 2 complaints were escalated from Level 1 as fuller investigation was required. Both of these complaints were upheld.

The Level 2 complaints were all resolved within twenty working days. In all three cases the complainants were satisfied with the way in which their complaints were managed and with the actions taken to resolve their issues.

## Review by the SPSO

If a complainant has exhausted the College's complaints handling process but remains dissatisfied with our decision or the way in which we dealt with a complaint, they can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to review the way in which the complaint was handled. No complaints were referred to the SPSO during 2019/20.

## Apology & Redress

We always discuss with a complainant the solution they would like to see to the complaint. Where a complaint is upheld we will implement the solution agreed with the complainant. In most cases an apology was issued with an explanation as to what went wrong. In all cases the complainant was satisfied that their complaint had been dealt with appropriately. No ex gratia payments were made in 2019/20.

**Table 1 Number of complaints per year at Levels 1 & 2**

Year	No. of complaints Level1	No. of complaints Level 2
2015/16	14	2
2016/17	20	5
2017/18	23	6
2018/19	15	1
2019/20	32	3