M

REGIONAL BOARD REPORT

BORDERS COLLEGE REGIONAL BOARD

Subject: Annual Complaints Handling Report July 2020 – June 2021	**Purpose:** **For Approval** ☐ **For Discussion** ☐ **For Information** ☒
Prepared by: Heather Anderson	**Date:** 7 October 2021

Purpose: To provide the Board with an overview of the complaints received in the last year, the actions taken to resolve these and the lessons learned.

Linked to Strategic Ambition: Create high quality learning and training opportunities which are relevant, enabling and flexible

Performance Measures: Student, staff & employer satisfaction in top quartile nationally

Linked to Strategic Risk Register: New Risk (outwith themes)

New Risk Commentary:

Executive Summary:

The attached report provides an analysis of the complaints received in academic session 2020 - 2021. These have been dealt with following our Complaints Handling procedure and in compliance with the requirements of the Public Service Reform (Scotland) Act 2010.

Twenty-one frontline complaints were received in the period, which was a decrease of eleven over the same period in the previous year. Thirteen of these complaints were upheld, two were partially upheld and the remaining six were not upheld. No Level 2 complaints were received during session 2020 – 2021.

Where complaints have been upheld we have used the outcome to make changes to our service and through this process we use complaints as a driver for improvement.

Recommendation: To note the content of the report.

Previous Committee Approvals: No

For publication ☒	**For publication with redactions** ☐	**Not for publication** ☐

Borders College

Complaints Handling Report 2020/2021

Regionally Focused – Globally Engaged

Contents

Executive Summary 3

Indicator One: Learning from complaints 4

Frontline (Level 1) complaints 4

Investigation (Level 2) complaints 4

Review by the SPSO 4

Indicator Two: The total number of complaints received 5

Indicator Three: The number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed within the set timescale of 5 and 20 working days. 5

Indicator Four: The average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage 6

Indicator Five: The outcome of Complaints at each stage 6

Indicator Six: Raising awareness 6

Indicator Seven: Staff training in complaint handling 7

Indicator Eight: Customer satisfaction with the complaints process 7

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 (CHP) 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 CHP 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. Most 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.

Indicator One: Learning from complaints

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 gone wrong and immediate action taken to resolve the problem.

We continue to make changes to the way in which we do things because of some of these complaints. Often changes have been specific to a programme or service, such as increasing a level of support to a student or making a staff member aware of their style of communication. These also include course organisation and delivery of specific services such as improving information about courses or student funding, referral for learning support, and improvements to communication with students.

The number of Level 1 complaints dealt with in the year was lower than the previous year's total, decreasing from thirty-two complaints in 2019/20 to twenty-one in 2020/21.

This decrease could be attributable to off campus activity and so there were not the same level of staff and student interactions that sometimes results in complaints taking place. However, interactions continue online, and it could be argued this could have led to a greater incidence of miscommunication and lack of understanding. There will be renewed awareness raising of the CHP within the College during this academic year. Once again, most complaints were from students, with complaints from carers being the next largest category. Where a complaint against a 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.

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.

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 2020/21.

Indicator Two: The total number of complaints received

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

Year	**No. of complaints Level 1**	**No. of complaints Level 2**
2018/19	15	1
2019/20	32	3
2020/21	21	0

Overall the % number of complaints (21) against the total number of student enrolments (4112) in 2020/21 is 0.005%.

Indicator Three: The number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed within the set timescale of 5 and 20 working days.

During the period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021 fifteen of the twenty-one frontline complaints received were resolved within our target timescale of five working days.

Year	No. of complaints	% of total complaints
2020/21	15 complaints resolved within timescale	71%

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. Initially there were some complaints at the start of the academic session that went over the 5 working days and so managers were asked to remind staff about the 5 working day response required. Following this the situation improved however, there was one complaint that took 23 days to resolve as the student was presenting with mental health difficulties that meant they were not contactable. Once the complaint had been dealt with it was partially upheld.

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

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

Year	No. of complaints	Annual Average
2020/21	21	5 working days

Indicator Five: The outcome of Complaints at each stage

2020/21 Complaints

In that period, there were twenty-one frontline complaints (Level 1) and no complaints requiring a full investigation (Level 2). In all cases but two, the complainants were satisfied with the outcome and in all cases apart from two did they indicate the complaint had been resolved.

Year	Number of Level 1 complaints	Complaint Not Upheld		Complaint Partially Upheld		Complaint Upheld		Complaint Resolved	
2020/21	21	6	28%	2	11%	13	62%	19	90%

Indicator Six: Raising awareness

In 2020/21 there were complaints from a range of students in different curriculum areas who were struggling to complete their studies at home. This impacted on their progression opportunities and the successful completion of the certificated award. Some students were asked to return to campus for competency assessment and this also created situations which they were not prepared for and indicated they were not being sufficiently supported by college staff.

As well as making students more aware of the complaint process there is a lack of information around the level of vulnerability for the different students making complaints There is currently no clear data on the characteristics of the individuals who have used the complaints process apart from curriculum area. These two aspects of the complaints reporting, and recording will be addressed for 2021/22.

Indicator Seven: Staff training in complaint handling

In 2020/21 due to remote working and compliance with social distancing there has been no formal training taking place with staff around the complaints process. However, all complaints are discussed at the monthly Senior Leadership meetings, the Borders College Complaints Handling Procedure has been revised and approved at the Joint Consultative Committee in March 2021 and the amendments were communicated to staff in the college monthly E magazine.

In 2021/22 we will be reviewing the mandatory training for complaints for new and continuing staff.

Indicator Eight: Customer satisfaction with the complaints process

In 2020/21 there is a high level of satisfaction with the complaints process and only two people indicated they were not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint. One concerned student funding and another the allocation of an appropriate course. All individuals indicated a good level of access to the Complaints Handling Procedure and likewise there were no further actions identified by the Senior Leadership Team that could have advanced the issues for the individuals concern