

NORTH EAST SCOTLAND COLLEGE

Complaints Handling Report

Quarter 1 (August – October)

Academic Year 2026-27

© North East Scotland College - All rights reserved.

Contents

1. Introduction 2
2. Quarter 1 at a Glance 2
3. Quarterly Trends and Evaluation 3
4. Impact on Service Delivery 5
5. Further Education Complaints Performance Indicator Definitions 7
6. Complaints Handling Key Performance Indicators 8
7. Escalation and Extension Rationale 9
8. Complaints Handling Feedback Questionnaire 9
9. Conclusion and Areas for Monitoring 9

© North East Scotland College - All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

North East Scotland College (NESCol) is committed to providing high-quality services and responding effectively when stakeholders raise concerns. Complaints provide an important source of feedback and help the College identify opportunities to improve the learner and stakeholder experience.
The College monitors complaint volumes, themes, outcomes and response times. It also considers the learning identified through individual complaints and the actions taken by relevant departments. Complaints handling performance reports are published quarterly on the College website and shared with the Senior Leadership Team.

NESCol's complaints handling procedures are reviewed regularly and updated where required in response to stakeholder experience, internal developments and external guidance. The College is a member of the sector Complaints Handling Advisory Group, which operates through the College Development Network and in association with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

Complaints are handled in accordance with relevant legislation, including the Data Protection Act 2018, the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

2. Quarter 1 at a Glance

During Quarter 1, NESCol received 42 complaints, compared with 19 complaints during the same period in 2025-26. This represents an increase of 23 complaints. The number of complaints received per 100 of the College population also increased from 0.2 to 0.4.

Most complaints were managed through frontline resolution, with 36 complaints closed at Stage 1. Four complaints were closed at Stage 2 and two were closed following escalation from Stage 1. All 42 complaints received during the quarter were closed by the end of the reporting period.

The most common complaint themes related to:

- funding and bursary;
- staff conduct; and
- application, admission, interview, enrolment and induction processes.

The increase in complaint volume is notable. However, the results relate to one reporting quarter and do not, on their own, establish a sustained trend. Complaint volumes, themes and response times will continue to be monitored during the remainder of the academic year.
Learning identified through complaints this quarter highlighted opportunities to improve:

- coordination between academic and support teams;
- communication about changes affecting the learner experience; and
- communication and reassurance when unexpected timetable or room changes occur.

© North East Scotland College - All rights reserved.

3. Quarterly Trends and Evaluation

3.1 Complaint Volume

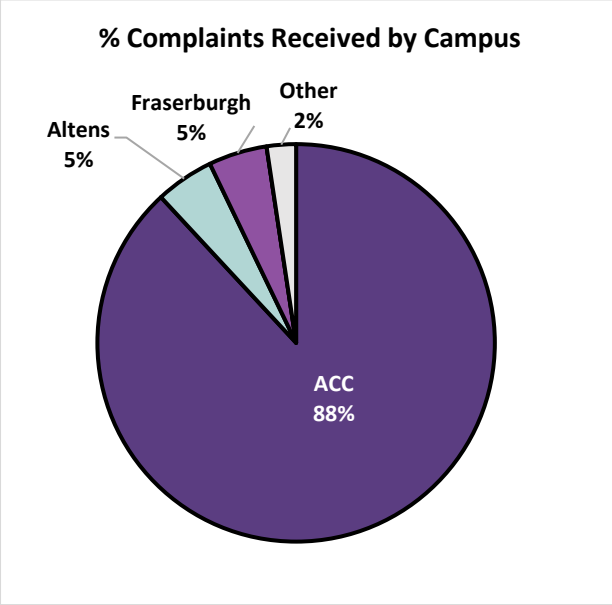
NESCol received 42 complaints during Quarter 1. This compares with 19 complaints received during the corresponding period in 2025-26. Complaints per 100 of the College population increased from 0.2 to 0.4.

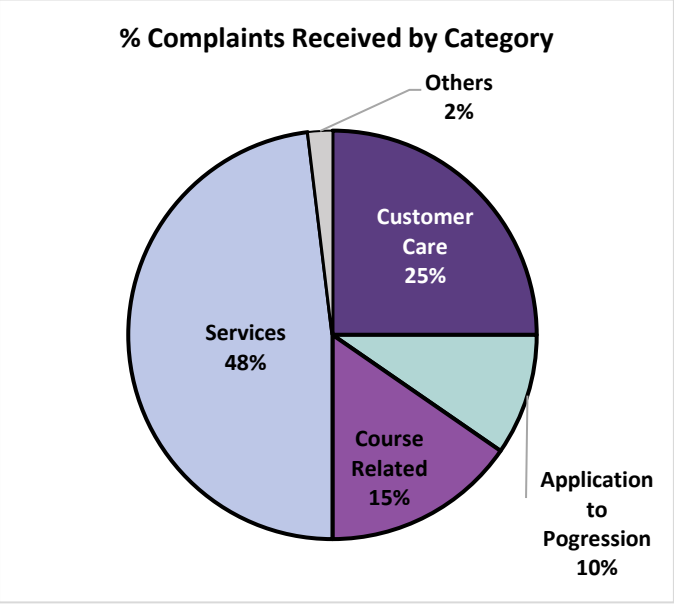
The increase is notable when compared with the same quarter in the previous academic year. However, complaint volumes can fluctuate between reporting periods and one quarter alone does not provide sufficient evidence to establish a sustained trend or determine the reasons for the increase. The College will continue to monitor complaint volumes and themes during subsequent quarters.

3.2 Complaint categories and themes

The largest numbers of complaints were recorded within the Services, Customer Care, Course Related, and Applications to Progression categories. The most frequently identified themes related to funding and bursary, staff conduct, and application and admission processes.

These themes indicate that clear and timely communication remains important at key points in the learner journey, particularly where decisions affect funding, applications, course arrangements or access to support.





Some complaints may contain more than one issue and may therefore be recorded against more than one category. As a result, the total number recorded across complaint categories may be greater than the number of individual complaints received.

© North East Scotland College - All rights reserved.

3.3 Complaint origin

Of the 42 complaints received:

- 37 related to Aberdeen City Campus;
- 2 related to Altens Campus;
- 2 related to Fraserburgh Campus; and
- 1 related to another College location.

Aberdeen City Campus recorded the largest number of complaints. The College will continue to monitor complaint volumes and themes across its campuses to identify any emerging or location-specific issues.

3.4 Complaint outcomes

Of the complaints closed at Stage 1:

- 11 were upheld;
- 8 were partially upheld;
- 11 were not upheld; and
- 6 were resolved.

Taken together, upheld and partially upheld complaints represented 19 of the 36 Stage 1 closures (52.8%). These outcomes reinforce the value of complaints as a source of learning and provide an opportunity to identify where improvements may be required.

Of the four complaints closed at Stage 2, one was upheld and three were not upheld. Both complaints closed following escalation from Stage 1 were partially upheld. Given the small number of complaints considered at these stages, the outcomes should be interpreted with caution.

3.5 Response times

The average time taken to close a Stage 1 complaint was 6.6 working days, compared with 5.3 working days in Quarter 1 of 2025-26. The average closure time was 18.2 working days for Stage 2 complaints and 20 working days for escalated complaints.

Thirteen Stage 1 complaints required additional time to allow relevant information to be gathered and the issues raised to be fully considered.

The number of Stage 1 extensions and the increase in the average Stage 1 closure time will continue to be monitored during subsequent quarters.

Stage 2 and escalated complaints recorded as closed during the quarter were completed within the applicable 20-working-day timescale.

© North East Scotland College - All rights reserved.

4. Impact on Service Delivery

When a complaint is closed, the Quality Department asks the relevant department to identify any learning and actions arising from the complaint, where applicable.

This process helps the College move beyond responding to individual cases and use complaint feedback to support wider service improvement. The examples below illustrate learning identified during Quarter 1, the actions arising and the intended benefits for learners.

4.1 Improving coordination before decisions are communicated

Issue Identified
A student received conflicting information about their position on a course.
Learning
The complaint highlighted the importance of effective coordination between academic and support teams before decisions affecting an applicant are communicated.
Action
Relevant teams will reinforce the requirement for appropriate post-assessment discussion and confirmation before information is issued to the applicant.
Intended impact
The action is intended to reduce the risk of applicants receiving inconsistent information and to provide greater clarity about course decisions and the support available.
Follow-up
Any further complaints involving conflicting course or support information will be monitored to assess whether additional action is required.

4.2 Improving communication about changes to the learner experience

Issue Identified
A student raised concerns after being advised that a different lecturer would deliver the next year of the course.
Learning
Although staffing arrangements may need to change for operational reasons, the complaint highlighted the importance of managing transitions carefully. Learners should receive clear and timely information about changes, and incoming teaching staff should have relevant information about learner progress and agreed support needs.
Action
The feedback was shared with the relevant Curriculum Manager. Academic teams will reinforce arrangements for communicating significant staffing changes and for supporting an effective handover where responsibility for teaching transfers between staff.
Intended impact
The action is intended to support continuity in the learner experience and ensure that significant staffing changes are communicated clearly and managed effectively.
Follow-up
Relevant teams will monitor feedback and any further complaints associated with staffing transitions.

© North East Scotland College - All rights reserved.

4.3 Improving communication about timetable changes and room changes

Issue Identified

A student raised concerns following an unexpected change to room arrangements for practical coursework.

Learning

The complaint highlighted the importance of providing prompt information and reassurance when unexpected changes affect learning arrangements.

Action

The Academic Tutor and Curriculum Manager were made aware of the issue and asked to reinforce open communication with the learner group. Where a similar disruption occurs, relevant staff should explain the circumstances, confirm the alternative arrangements and provide an opportunity for learners to raise concerns.

Intended impact

The action is intended to reduce uncertainty, ensure learners understand how practical learning requirements will be met and support the prompt resolution of concerns.

Follow-up

Any recurring issues involving room availability or communication of timetable changes will be monitored through subsequent complaint reporting.

© North East Scotland College - All rights reserved.

5. Further Education Complaints Performance Indicator Definitions

The following definitions are applied consistently throughout the complaints handling performance indicators.

5.1 Stage 1: Frontline resolution

Stage 1 covers complaints responded to through frontline resolution. It does not include complaints that are subsequently escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2, as these are reported separately under escalated complaints.

Stage 1 normally has a response timescale of five working days. An extension of up to a further five working days may be applied where there is a clear and proportionate reason for additional time.

5.2 Stage 2: Investigation

Stage 2 covers complaints handled through investigation. These may include complaints that:

- are submitted directly at Stage 2 by the complainant;
- are assessed by the College as complex, serious or high-risk and therefore unsuitable for Stage 1 consideration; or
- otherwise require detailed investigation.

Stage 2 normally has a response timescale of 20 working days. Where an investigation cannot reasonably be completed within that period, a revised timescale may be agreed and communicated in accordance with the Complaints Handling Procedure.

5.3 Escalated complaints

An escalated complaint is one that was initially considered at Stage 1 and was subsequently moved to Stage 2.

This may occur where the complainant remains dissatisfied with the Stage 1 outcome and asks for the complaint to be investigated further, or where escalation is required under the applicable complaint handling rules.

5.4 Population

The population figure represents the total student population at the agreed reporting date. This figure is used to calculate the number of complaints received per 100 of the College population.

NESCol applies these definitions when reporting quarterly complaints handling performance to support accuracy and consistency.

© North East Scotland College - All rights reserved.

6. Complaints Handling Key Performance Indicators

COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE INDICATORS	Q1	
Total no. of complaints received & complaints received per 100 population	**No.**	**%**
Number of complaints Received	42	100.0
College Population and Number of Complaints received per 100 population	10078	0.4
No. of complaints closed at each stage and as a % of all complaints closed	**No.**	**%**
Number of complaints closed at Stage 1 and % of total closed	36	85.7%
Number of complaints closed at Stage 2 and % of total closed	4	9.5%
Number of complaints closed after Escalation and % of total closed	2	4.8%
Open	0	0.0%
No. upheld, partially upheld and not upheld at each stage and as a % of complaints closed at that stage		
Stage 1	**No.**	**%**
Number and % of complaints upheld at Stage 1	11	30.6%
Number and % of complaints partially upheld at Stage 1	8	22.2%
Number and % of complaints not upheld at Stage 1	11	30.6%
Number and % of complaints resolved at Stage 1	6	16.7%
Stage 2	**No.**	**%**
Number and % of complaints upheld at Stage 2	1	25.0%
Number and % of complaints partially upheld at Stage 2	0	0.0%
Number and % of complaints not upheld at Stage 2	3	75.0%
Number and % of complaints resolved at Stage 2	0	0.0%
Escalated	**No.**	**%**
Number and % of complaints upheld after Escalation	0	0.0%
Number and % of complaints partially upheld after Escalation	2	100.0%
Number and % of complaints not upheld after Escalation	0	0.0%
Number and % of complaints resolved at Stage Escalation	0	0.0%
Total working days and average time in working days to close complaints at each stage	**No.**	**Av.**
Total working days and average time in working days to close complaints at Stage 1	239	6.6
Total working days and average time in working days to close complaints at Stage 2	73	18.2
Total working days and average time in working days to close complaints after Escalation	40	20.0
Number and % of complaints closed within set timescales (S1=5 workings days; S2=20 working days; Escalated = 20 working days)	**No.**	**%**
No. and % of Stage 1 complaints closed within 5 working days	23	63.9%
No. and % of Stage 1 complaints not closed with 5 working days	13	36.1%
No. and % of Stage 2 complaints closed within 20 working days	4	100.0%
No. and % of Stage 2 complaints not closed within 20 working days	0	0.0%
No. and % of Escalated complaints closed within 20 working days	2	100.0%
No. and % of Escalated complaints not closed within 20 working days	0	0.0%
Number and % of complaints closed at each stage where extensions have been authorised	**No.**	**%**
No. and % of Stage 1 complaints closed within 10 working days (extension)	8	61.5%
No. and % of Stage 1 complaints not closed within 10 working days (extension)*	5	38.5%
No. and % of Stage 2 complaints closed within 40 working days (extension)	0	0.0%
No. and % of Stage 2 complaints not closed within 40 working days (extension)	0	0.0%
No. and % of Escalated complaints closed within 40 working days (extension)	0	0.0%
No. and % of Escalated complaints not closed within 40 working days (extension)	0	0.0%

*Some frontline complaints required additional time to allow for further investigation.

© North East Scotland College - All rights reserved.

7. Escalation and Extension Rationale

Two complaints were escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2 during Quarter 1. Escalation allows a complaint to be considered through a more detailed investigation where the complainant remains dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response or where further examination is required.

Thirteen Stage 1 complaints required additional time during the quarter. Extensions were applied where additional investigation or information was required to provide a full response to the issues raised.

Extensions should only be used where there is a clear and proportionate reason for doing so. The complainant should be informed of the reason for the extension and the revised response date.

The use of Stage 1 extensions, and particularly complaints extending beyond 10 working days, will continue to be monitored during subsequent quarters.

8. Complaints Handling Feedback Questionnaire

After receiving a response, complainants are invited to complete a complaints handling feedback questionnaire. The questionnaire provides an opportunity to comment on different aspects of the process, including communication, accessibility, timeliness and the clarity of the response.

The Quality Department reviews the feedback received to identify potential improvements to complaint handling practice and procedure.

Questionnaire findings will be reported where there is sufficient evidence to identify meaningful themes. Where response numbers are low, the College will avoid drawing conclusions that are not supported by the available evidence.

9. Conclusion and Areas for Monitoring

Quarter 1 recorded an increase in complaints compared with the corresponding period in 2025-26. Most complaints were managed through frontline resolution, and the learning identified demonstrates how complaint feedback is being used to inform service improvement. As one quarter alone does not establish a sustained trend, performance will continue to be monitored throughout the academic year.

During the remainder of 2026-27, the College will monitor:

- whether the increase in complaint volume continues;
- emerging or recurring themes within complaints relating to funding and bursary, staff interactions, and application or admission processes;
- Stage 1 response times and the use of extensions;
- the completion of actions identified through complaint learning; and
- feedback from complainants about their experience of the complaint handling process.

The Quarter 2 report will provide an update on these areas and identify any further emerging themes requiring action.

© North East Scotland College - All rights reserved.