



Unresolved

The state of student complaints
in further education



national union of students



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Foreword

For some time now there has been cause for concern in relation to the way in which the complaints of further education students are dealt with. As we look ahead to the future of our sector – the end of routine Ofsted inspections and the extension of compulsory education - it is clear that students are in need of a safeguard to ensure that systematic problems are detected and dealt with in institutions.

Students in further education who experience issues with the quality of their learning, and those students who fall victim to unfair discrimination or poor provision are without an independent adjudicator to preside over complaints.

Over the last year NUS has been conducting research into the experiences of students in relation to these problems, as well as the procedures that colleges currently use to deal with them. The complaints and appeals procedures in our sector are not monitored in any formal way, and students are unable to turn to an independent adjudicator – the implementation of which would make providers truly accountable.

This report contains the findings of our research, and supports our current work on student complaints in FE: to highlight the issues with the current complaints system, and to lobby for the implementation of a national independent adjudicator for student complaints in the Further Education sector.

In Unity

Toni Pearce

Vice President (Further Education)



Executive summary

This report has been produced to present the findings of research conducted by NUS over the last 18 months, and is designed to support our work on issues surrounding student complaints and appeals procedures within the further education sector.

The findings of this research support the anecdotal evidence with which NUS is consistently presented by constituent members. This evidence suggests that more can be done by colleges to promote the existence of complaints procedures and the processes involved, more can be done to encourage individuals to submit a complaint if they feel unfairly discriminated against, and more can be done to resolve complaints as quickly and fairly as possible.

Based on this anecdotal evidence, NUS developed and conducted the following research during the academic year 2010/11. Through our research, we aimed to gain and share a better understanding of the issues faced by students relating to complaints and appeals procedures used within further education colleges, and sought to develop a set of recommendations to support the case for the introduction of an independent complaints adjudicator, and a revision of procedures within our sector.

NUS has uncovered an array of evidence supporting the calls for a procedural review, as well as the introduction of an independent body. While colleges do make efforts to promote their complaints and appeals procedures to their students, in some cases this promotion does not have the desired impact in raising students' awareness of their rights in this area. Furthermore, the procedural timeframes and processes implemented by colleges vary greatly from one college to another, which can lead to confusion throughout the sector.

Elsewhere in the report, we highlight a lack of awareness of the external redress measures existing in England, and the non-existence of such a mechanism in Wales. Indeed, the findings underline the need both for a review of current procedures and the creation an independent body, to ensure a fair and equitable relationship between user and provider.

As such, NUS has developed a number of recommendations that, if adopted, would help to rectify the issues currently faced by students when navigating complaints processes. It is hoped that the relevant bodies will note our recommendations and give them serious consideration.

Background to this research

Discussions with student officers, representatives and other partners within the sector reveal growing levels of concern about college procedures for student complaints and appeals. More specifically, these concerns relate to the lack of procedural publicity directed towards students, complaint response and resolution timeframes, and the way in which these procedures differ so greatly from college to college.

External redress procedures are a key focus of this research; more specifically, whether they exist and, if so, whether students are aware of them. In England, the Skills Funding Agency and the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) fund large parts of the further education sector – including the majority of colleges and post-16 education and training providers. As part of their funding agreements, providers are expected to have complaints procedures that deal with “genuine expressions of dissatisfaction” and that these complaints are dealt with “promptly, fairly and proportionately”. Moreover, action resulting from complaints “should help to improve the quality of education”¹.

The lack of external redress procedures in colleges in Wales has given rise to lobbying and campaigning work from students and their representatives on this issue, the desired outcome of which is the introduction of external redress processes in the further education sector in Wales.

The insight gained through this research into current practice surrounding complaints and appeals has enabled NUS to develop a series of recommendations for the future of complaints and appeals in further education. The recommendations support our view that there is a need for an all-encompassing review of sectoral complaints procedures, and, more urgently, the introduction of an independent adjudicator.

Aims and objectives

NUS conducted this research to achieve a number of aims and objectives:

- to understand student awareness of college complaints and appeals procedures and the accessibility of these procedures across the UK
- to gain an appreciation of the inconsistencies between colleges in response and resolution time for complaints and appeals, and highlight the undermining effect this has on procedures
- to investigate whether individuals making complaints and/or appeals are able to have representation in meetings and if so, who is allowed to be a representative
- to better understand concerns in relation to the impact that making a complaint has on student relationships with college staff
- to understand the frequency of complaints within individual colleges, and whether complaint resolution leads to college improvement, a stipulation of college funding agreements
- to gauge student opinion relating to external redress and the potential for an independent complaints body in FE
- to develop a set of recommendations in relation to complaints procedures, and to use them to help underpin a revised complaints system in further education

Research methodology

To achieve the aims and objectives of our research, we used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. There were:

- focus group discussions
- an online survey
- a mapping exercise of college complaints procedures

Focus groups

The focus groups took place during the 2010/11 academic year and included questions designed to identify a range of concerns highlighted by students. These focus groups were conducted at various NUS events, including: MyFE 2010, FEstival 2010, the Further Education Zone Conference in October 2010, and at the NUS Wales Conference 2011. Each of these focus groups had between 12 and 40 participants from a range of colleges across the UK.

Discussions within the focus groups produced further evidence to demonstrate the wide variations in college complaints and appeals procedures, and the student experience of this. Indeed, students stated that it “takes too long for complaints to be dealt with”, “complaints systems are not publicised” and that there are “inconsistencies between different colleges”.

Online survey responses

The online survey took place between 18 March and 3 May 2011, and allowed us to ask specific questions to a much wider group of participants. The survey was targeted towards students’ union officers and those individuals within colleges responsible for dealing with complaints and appeals. The survey was designed to give an overview of the situation within individual colleges.

The survey received 53 responses, although not all respondents answered all of the questions. Responses were received from a range of colleges including:

- Coleg Llandrillo Cymru
- East Durham College
- Coleg Glan Hafren
- St Brendan’s Sixth Form College
- Sheffield College
- Mid-Cheshire College
- Gower College
- Redcar & Cleveland College
- Coleg Menai
- Leeds College of Music
- Tresham College of Further and Higher Education
- York College
- Walsall College
- Bradford College
- Deeside College
- Canterbury College
- Newcastle College
- Richmond upon Thames College
- Cornwall College
- Wakefield College
- Coleg Gwent

Mapping of complaints procedures in Wales

To achieve a more detailed picture of complaints and appeals in FE colleges in Wales, and the associated issues, further research was undertaken to investigate college procedures. Using data from the 23 further education colleges in Wales, NUS conducted a mapping exercise, the purpose of which was, to gain a representative sample of the wider experience across the UK.

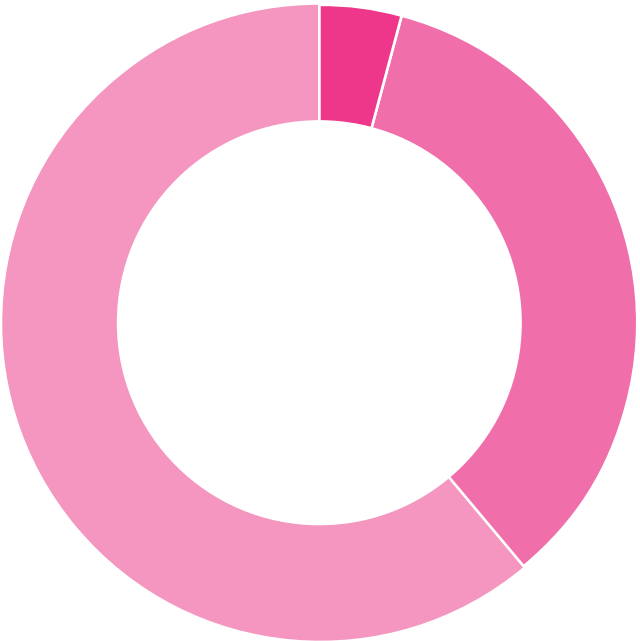
NUS conducted a study of college websites, investigating the accessibility of complaints procedures, and conducting an analysis of the style in which they were written, the language used and the number of stages within each procedure.

Awareness and accessibility of procedures

Previous NUS research² has identified that almost 75 per cent of student advisers thought that students were only slightly or not at all aware of their institution's complaints procedures. Through focus group discussions, we found further evidence relating to students' awareness of their colleges complaints and appeals procedures. For example, NUS was told by one participant that their "complaints systems are not publicised". NUS believes that colleges should remind students about their complaints procedures periodically throughout their course of study, which would ensure that students are equipped with information necessary for a positive educational experience. The timing of these reminders is critical, and providers should take note in particular of assessment timetables when distributing them.

The focus groups demonstrated that there were inconsistencies between colleges in relation to student awareness of complaints procedures. The online survey included a question on this topic, the answers to which revealed that only 4.3 per cent of respondents believed their students to be fully aware of the procedures, although none believed that their students weren't aware of the procedures at all. However, a significant number of respondents, 60.9 per cent, thought that their students were only 'slightly aware' of college procedures.

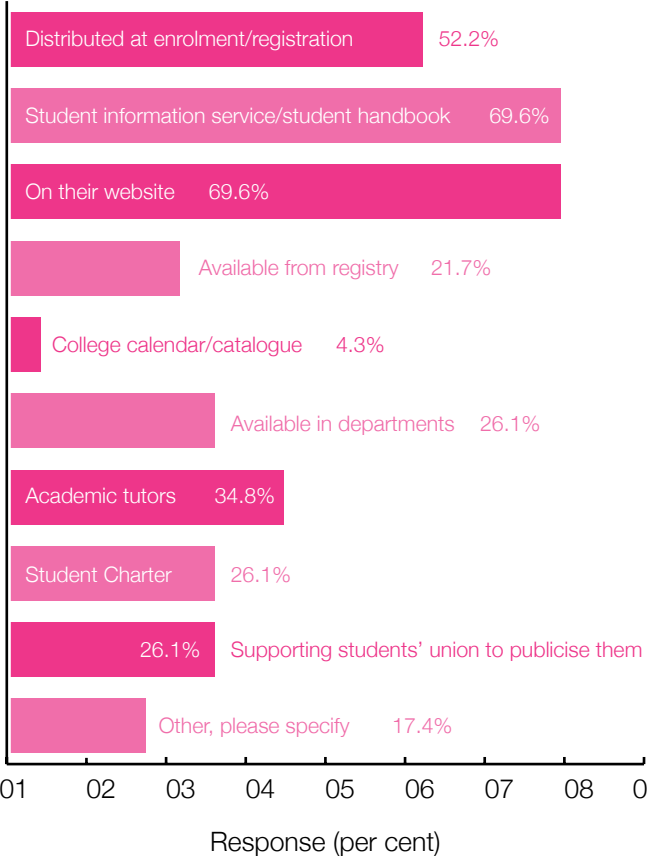
How aware would you say students are of the complaints and appeals procedures at your college?



- Fully aware – 4.3%
- Reasonably aware – 34.8%
- Slightly aware – 60.9%
- Not at all – 0%

The focus groups highlighted that the methods used to promote complaints procedures differ greatly from college to college. As such, we asked survey respondents to tell us about the publicity of complaints procedures in their institution. On a positive note, the survey findings suggest that colleges do invariably use multiple mechanisms to publicise their procedures. The most common method cited by respondents was information on the college website. It is not clear from the findings, however, how easily accessible this information is. Other publicity methods cited included information in the student handbook, or distribution of information during enrolment.

How does your college publicise its complaints and appeals procedures?



To further understand the publicity of complaints procedures, NUS used the mapping exercise carried out with colleges in Wales as a means of testing procedural accessibility. Through this exercise we found that three out of the 23 Welsh colleges had no attainable version of a complaints procedure on their websites or on the internet. Three more institutions had no formal complaints procedure document available for download, but had published a short explanation of their process on their website for students to read.

In terms of ensuring that complaints procedures were accessible to all audiences, Gower College Swansea and Coleg Ceredigion used graphs and charts to illustrate their complaints processes more simply, making them easier to understand.

When dealing with complaints and appeals procedures, it is important to ensure that students are aware of the mechanisms involved and that these are transparent and accessible. NUS believes that colleges should make information on their complaints and appeals procedures easy to understand and publicly available. Information such as this could be shared through college virtual learning environments or other methods. Most importantly, students should be informed of these procedures during enrolment so that they are aware of their right to make a complaint if they feel it is necessary.

Procedural timeframes

Both the focus groups and the online survey generated a number of interesting pieces of evidence in relation to the timeframes between making a complaint and that complaint being resolved.

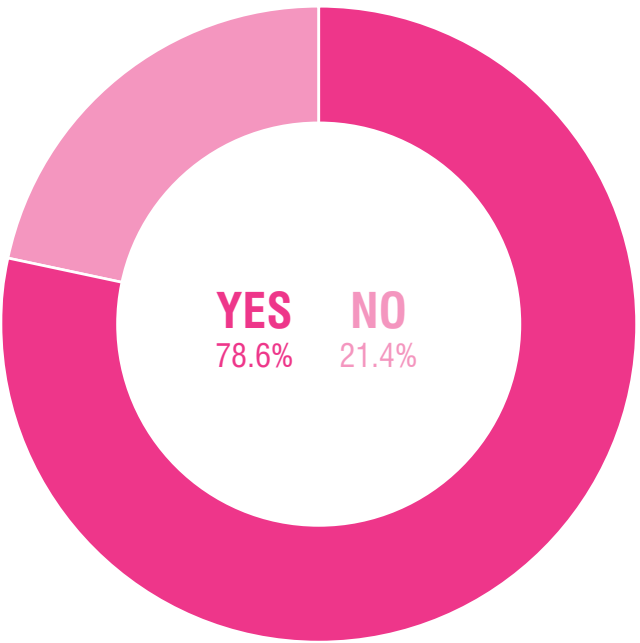
A number of responses revealed that colleges take an unacceptable amount of time to deal with complaints. One respondent told us that “complaints could be dealt with quickly at [their] institution but that would require persistence from the student(s) involved”, while another told us that “the vast majority of complaints are formally closed within 20 days, and in some cases where further dialogue with the Principal is required this can extend to a term.” Finally, we were also told that “sometimes they [the college] delay or ignore it and hope that people get bored”.

Furthermore, the research has revealed examples of complaints taking over six months to resolve, and in some cases taking even more than a year.

Through the online survey, we questioned respondents about the timeframes set by colleges within which to respond to, and resolve, complaints and appeals. The majority of respondents stated that students did not have a fixed time within which to lodge their complaints, although in some colleges there was a limit on being able to appeal against a decision. The research indicates that students are usually given between ten and 14 days to appeal against the outcome of a complaint.

Findings also show that over three quarters of colleges have a maximum time limit in which they are supposed to deal with a complaint.

Does your college have a maximum time-limit in which it will deal with a complaint or appeal?



It was found that maximum time limits from college to college ranged between ten and 20 days. At one college, the procedure is to acknowledge the complaint within five days and to deal with it within ten working days. This is the quickest response period that we found within our research.

The survey also asked if the college met the time limits set out within their procedures, with 75 per cent of respondents stating that their college ‘often’ or ‘always’ met the time limits set out. However, there were a significant minority of answers indicating that this only happened ‘sometimes’.

Another important factor influencing procedural timeframes is the number of stages necessary for the complaint to be resolved. It is apparent that the number of stages within college procedures varies between institutions, with respondents variously indicating two, three or four stages.

Our mapping exercise of colleges in Wales highlighted that the average number of stages in Wales is three. This is mostly likely to be ‘informal discussion’, followed by the ‘formal complaint’ and then the ‘appeal’.

We also found that the average timescale for the ‘Formal Complaint’ stage is 13 days, and for the ‘Appeals’ stage is 17 days. Colleges do not usually give timescales for the ‘Informal Discussion’ stage.

It should also be noted that Coleg Harlech/WEA (North Wales) has a specific ‘Complaints Officer’ who provides a single point of contact for students.

There are a wide variety of deadlines across different colleges in further education; NUS believes that there should be much greater consistency to ensure that processes are fair from one college to the next. Moreover, colleges should look to deal with complaints within two weeks from the day the complaint is made, with an additional week for an appeal, with clear timeframes for each stage of the process for both the student and the institution.

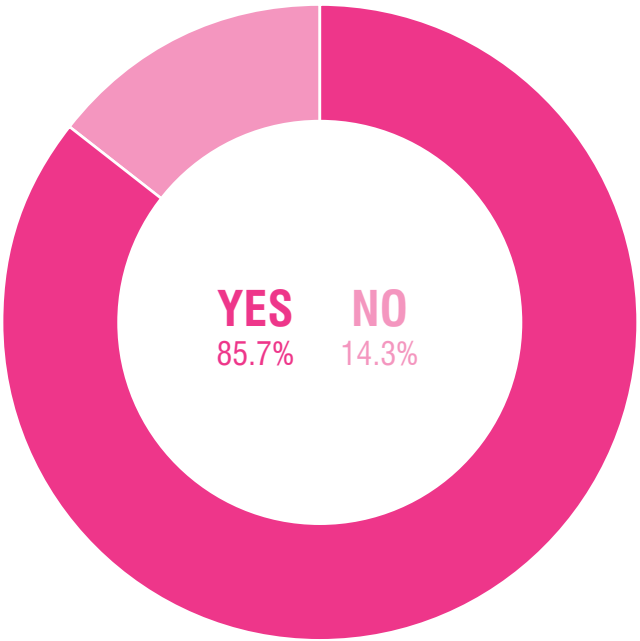
In some cases of particular complexity, the above timeframes may not be possible. However, colleges should aim for at least 90 per cent of cases to be resolved within this timeframe, and there should be regular communication with the student throughout the process.

College procedures can sometimes be overly bureaucratic and intimidating for students. As such, NUS believes there should be no more than three stages in any procedure. These could be an informal stage, a formal stage (this may include mediation) and an appeals stage. Following this, the student should be informed about external processes.

Representation

In our research, we investigated how students are represented within complaints processes. The online survey contained a question about representation throughout the complaints and appeals process. All respondents replied that a student can present their case in person, although not all replied that a friend (or representative) is able to accompany the student, with almost 15 per cent stating that this was not allowed. In some colleges, students’ unions are able to provide support and advice during the process; NUS believes that this is a positive feature which renders the process more accessible for those individuals making complaints.

Can a friend / representative of the student accompany them and present the case on their behalf?



In Wales, less than a third of colleges suggested that complainants be allowed support from someone such as a friend, a family member or other representative.

Some students are not able to get their case across in written format and may find the opportunity to present their case in person a useful addition to the process. In

these circumstances, it is vital to ensure that there is an agreed written record of face-to-face meetings in order to create a paper trail for the formal or external stages.

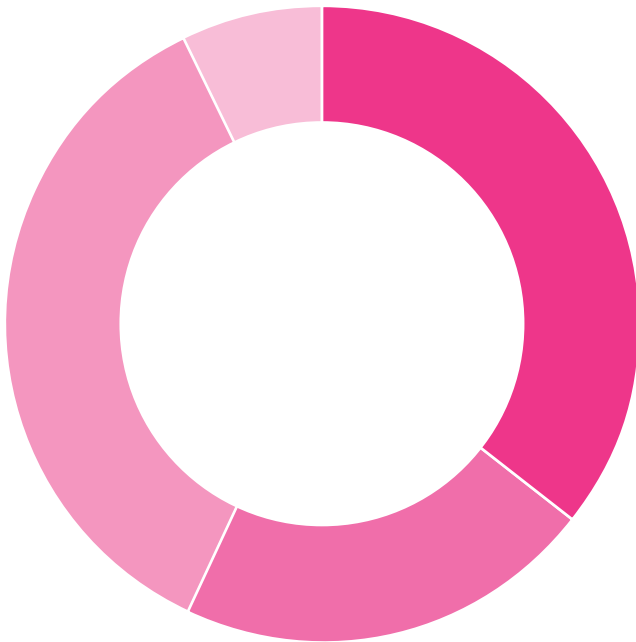
NUS believes that students’ unions should be given the resources to support students through complaints processes. Where this support is not available it should be introduced, and colleges are encouraged to support students’ unions in this development. Additionally, if a college believes a case is complex enough to seek legal advice then they should make the same support available to the student to ensure an ‘equality of arms’. The college should also ensure regular communication with the student throughout the process, and the student should have access to all the evidence used by the institution.

Impact on relationships

Around 60 per cent of people who responded to the online survey highlighted their awareness of students being afraid of making a complaint due to how it may affect their relationship with staff. Half of these respondents further believed that this issue was “reasonably” widespread within their college.

Results indicated that there may also be concern among respondents about how college procedures are viewed. Over 60 per cent of respondents believed that college complaints procedures were transparent, fair and just only in “some cases” or not at all. Indeed, one focus group participant said that “there is a feeling that the lecturers/learner services staff tend to discriminate against or ignore students for making complaints.”

Do you consider your college complaints procedure to be transparent, fair and just?



- Yes – 4.3%
- In the majority of cases – 34.8%
- In some cases – 60.9%
- No – 0%

In Wales, less than half of the college procedures analysed stated a commitment to ensuring student and teacher confidentiality when dealing with complaints.

Further to this we found that just over one third of colleges ensured that independence was a key consideration when fielding complaints. However, only Gower College Swansea indicated that independence was a key feature at every stage of their procedure.

Student perceptions of complaints procedures are crucial to their success; colleges should take care to mitigate against students being put off making a complaint in the first instance, and reassure them about how they will be treated upon lodging a complaint. Colleges should also be aware that, for some students, there is a social stigma attached to making a complaint, which could lead to problems going unreported.

Confidentiality should also be emphasised throughout the process, and where confidentiality cannot be guaranteed there should be assurances that no prejudice will result. Colleges should have explicit guidance stating that they will respond quickly to any cases where there is a breakdown in relationship between the student and the subject of the complaint.

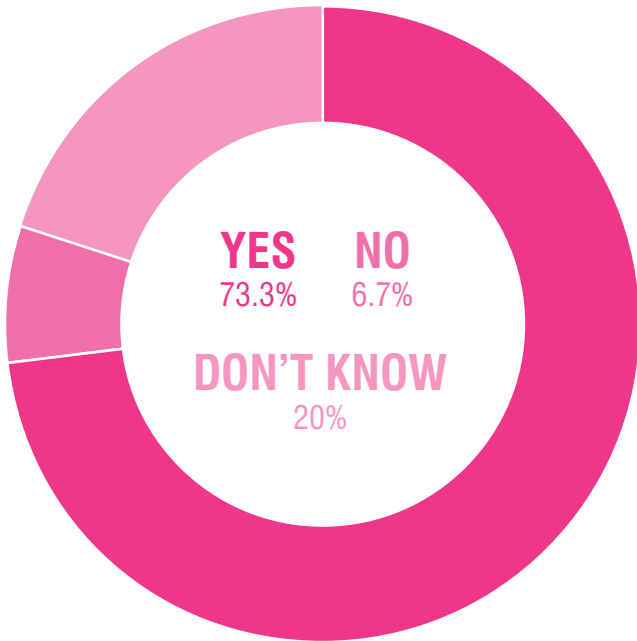
Students making complaints and appeals often have concerns about the fairness of procedures. Student representation on the complaints panel is crucial to ensuring a fair and equitable complaints system. In addition, complaints and appeals should be dealt with by someone seen as independent of the case, or better still, independent of the college.

Complaint frequency and college improvement

For colleges to use complaints to make improvements to the quality of education, they should record the number of complaints they receive on an annual basis. Our research indicates that numbers of complaints vary greatly from college to college. Responses from students at different colleges indicated that the number of recorded complaints in the previous academic year ranged from five to 176. One respondent stated that complaints in their college are only recorded once they reach stage three - the formal stage.

The research raises questions about how often complaints are recorded, who collects this data and if the data is collected in the same way at each institution. Over 25 per cent of respondents stated either that their college did not record the number of complaints, or that they did not know if complaints were recorded at all.

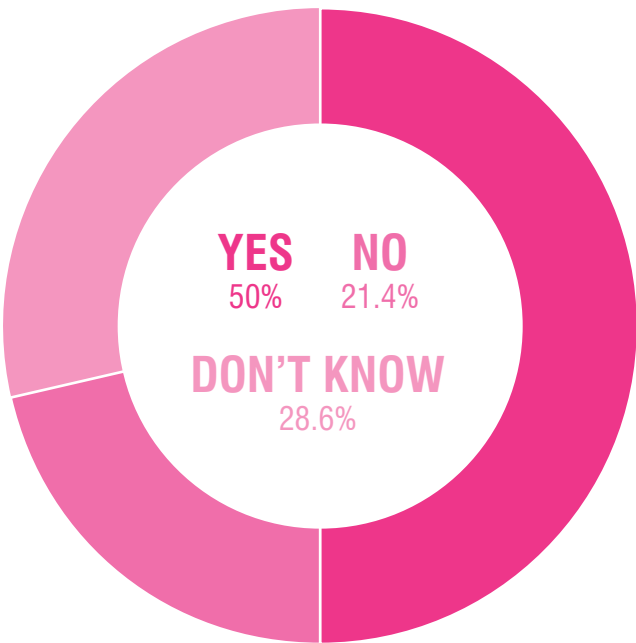
Does your institution record the number of complaints?



The online survey also found that a significant minority - over 20 per cent - of respondents stated that numbers and types of complaints received were not reported to the relevant college committee. However, it was reassuring to find that in those colleges where complaints were discussed by college committees, the information was passed upwards to the college governors, although this was not the case in all colleges.

It was also reassuring to find that most respondents believed that their college makes changes to activities and procedures following complaints that are upheld. The research has shown that approximately 50 per cent of colleges have reviewed their complaints procedures in the 18 months before the research was conducted, but in 75 per cent of cases the students' union was not involved in this process.

Has your college reviewed their complaints or appeals procedure in the last 18 months?



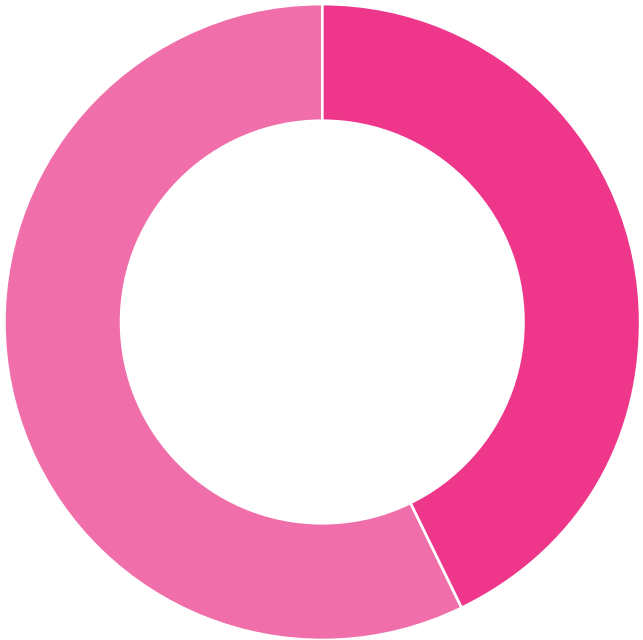
Once again the findings from research carried out in Wales revealed some interesting figures. We found that only two college complaints procedures featured any mention of how outcomes of complaints are reported, and less than half (11) of the colleges' complaints procedures referred to a review process. Of that number, six reviewed their procedures annually and three reviewed their procedures biennially.

To ensure adequate scrutiny of issues faced by students, and to have oversight of systemic problems, colleges should record both the number and outcome of complaints and appeals at their institution, and these should be reported to the governing body. This process will enable governors and college managers to identify any changes to make within college as a result of complaints received. Moreover, it should be standard practice for college procedures to undergo a major review at least every three years, and engagement of students and the students' union in this review is crucial.

External redress

In England, students in further education colleges are able to take their complaint to either the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) or Skills Funding Agency depending on who funds their course. However, our research shows that students in England are either "not at all" aware or only "slightly" aware of the external processes available to them if they wish to refer the decision made by the college to an independent body.

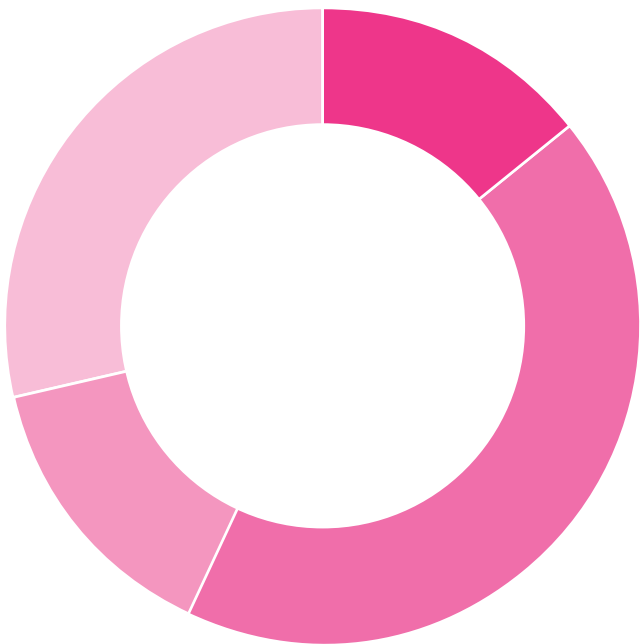
How aware are students that they are able to take their complaint to a body beyond their college?



- Not at all – 4.3%
- Slightly aware – 34.8%
- Reasonably aware – 60.9%
- Fully – 0%

In addition to this, respondents believed that colleges either did not publicise the external stage (42.9 per cent), or did so only "sometimes" (14.3 per cent).

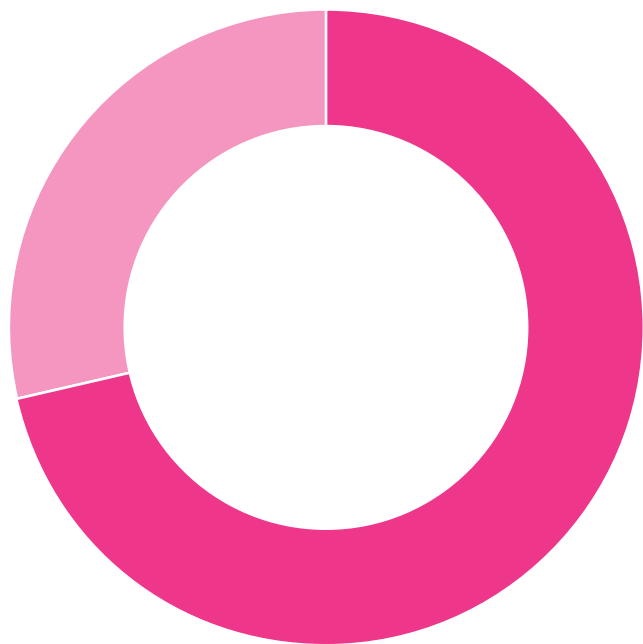
Does the college publicise this external appeal during the complaints process?



- Yes – 14.3%
- No – 42.9%
- Sometimes – 14.3%
- Don't know – 28.6%

In Wales, students who wish to appeal against a decision made by the college in relation to a complaint are currently unable to take this to an external or independent body beyond their college. However, 70 per cent of respondents believed that students should be able to do this.

Should students be able to appeal against the college’s decision to an independent body beyond the college?



- Yes – 71.4%
- No – 0%
- Sometimes – 28.6%
- Don't know – 0%

It is important to note that only 14.3 per cent of respondents believed that students would make use of external redress “often”, with 85.7 per cent of respondents believing that they would make use of this “sometimes”. It is clear however that external redress is important to the credibility and integrity of any college complaints system.

NUS believes that there should be an external stage to every complaints process to provide independent, external redress for students. During this stage, validity of the complaint should be examined, as well as whether the college has followed the correct processes. In England, college procedures should make reference to the YPLA and Skills Funding Agency, and in Scotland the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, as the independent, external arbiter. Moreover, it is vital that similar arrangements for an independent, external stage are introduced in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Recommendations for the government

Recommendation 1

To ensure that students are able to make informed choices about which course and provider to select, NUS urges the government to implement a national independent adjudicator for student complaints in further education.

Recommendation 2

The complaints adjudicator for further education should be directed by a board comprising independent directors appointed for their knowledge and skills, and include the major representative bodies in further education.

Recommendation 3

The adjudicator for further education would be fortified by policies established to deal with frivolous and/or vexatious complaints, as well as unacceptable behaviour.

Recommendation 4

To allow providers ease of access to, and ownership of, the service, the complaints adjudicator could and should be housed within the Learning and Skills Improvement Service, who would produce good practice guidance and support to aid improvement to college complaints processes.

Recommendation 5

Individual providers would ‘opt in’ via a subscription system, ensuring genuine endorsement from the sector.

Recommendations for providers

Recommendation 1:

Colleges should begin publicising their procedures during course enrolment, and should review how they publicise their procedures to make them more easily accessible, and easier to find on college websites or in handbooks.

Recommendation 2:

Colleges should remind students about procedures at appropriate points during the year.

Recommendation 3:

When a student makes a complaint or appeal, they should be provided with additional information about the process. This should include how long complaints usually take to be resolved, and more detail on the additional information needed, as well as the importance of appeal deadlines.

Recommendation 4:

All complaints and appeals procedures should be reviewed to ensure that they are written in plain language and are easily accessible to all students.

Recommendation 5:

All complaints and appeals should be dealt with within three weeks of being lodged with the college, two weeks for the complaint and a week for the appeal. In the small number of cases where the student believes they are experiencing an unnecessary delay, and the student has met the deadlines, they should be able to approach the external body before receiving the outcome of their complaint.

Recommendation 6:

If an institution does not adhere to its own timetable then it should provide a detailed explanation as to why not.

Recommendation 7:

Institutional complaints and appeals procedures should not have more than three stages. These could include an informal stage, a formal stage (which may include mediation), and an appeals stage.

Recommendation 8:

All staff who deal with complaints and appeals procedures should receive training from their employer, and this training should be extended to teaching staff.

Recommendation 9:

Students should be given the option of presenting their case in person if they wish, and to receive support from a friend, family member or students' union representative if requested.

Recommendation 10:

Colleges should make explicit that they will respond quickly to any cases where there is a breakdown in relationship between the student and the person they are complaining about on the basis of their complaint.

Recommendation 11:

Colleges should make information available about the number of complaints and appeals to the students' union, including the overall number and those upheld in full or in part.

Recommendation 12:

Colleges should make information available about their response to complaints, such as what they have done to review the procedures.

Appendix 1 – Focus group discussions

Participants in the three focus groups were asked to consider the following:

1. Positive and negatives of current complaints procedures
2. Timescales for resolving complaints
3. How institutions can promote the process
4. Who would be the adjudicator/body?
5. How can students be supported?
6. Which formats should students be able to submit complaints in?
7. Can the procedure be simplified, e.g. less stages?
8. How can students be reassured that their relationships with college/provider won't be damaged?
9. How often should the process be reviewed?
10. Should colleges/providers give information about number and outcome of cases?

Appendix 2 – Online survey responses

1. How aware would you say students are of the complaints and appeals procedures at your college?

Answer Options	Response (per cent)	Response Count
Not at all	0.0%	0
Slightly aware	60.9%	14
Reasonably well	34.8%	8
Fully	4.3%	1

2. How does your college publicise its complaints and appeals procedures? (Tick all that apply)

Answer Options	Response (per cent)	Response Count
Distributed at enrolment/ registration	52.2%	12
Student information service/student handbook	69.6%	16
On their website	69.6%	16
Available from registry	21.7%	5
College calendar/ catalogue	4.3%	1
Available in departments	26.1%	6
Academic tutors	34.8%	8
Student Charter	26.1%	6
Supporting students' union to publicise them	26.1%	6
Other, please specify	17.4%	4

3. Does your college have a maximum time-limit in which a student has to complain/appeal? What is this time limit?

13 respondents answered “no”.

Other responses

- 10 working days to appeal the outcome of a complaint
- Appeal is usually 10-14 days after the results transcript is issued.

4. Does your college have a maximum time limit in which it will deal with a complaint or appeal?

Answer Options	Response (per cent)	Response Count
Yes	78.6%	11
No	21.4%	3
If yes, how long?		12

If yes, how long?

- The maximum time the college will take to officially respond to a complaint is 20 days. If the complainant wishes to appeal the time frame can be extended depending on the nature of the appeal and any further investigation required.
- Acknowledgement of complaint within 5 working days. Response to complaint within 10 working days
- 10 working days
- 14 days for a response from college
- 10 days for first response
- 10 days, after that a response is usually made to the complainant.

- 15 days for the initial response
- Immediate response to acknowledge. 10 working days to deal
- 10 days

5. Does your college always adhere to this time-limit?

Answer Options	Response (per cent)	Response Count
Never	0.0%	0
Rarely	0.0%	0
Sometimes	25.0%	3
Often	33.3%	4
Always	41.7%	5

6. What is the longest time taken for a student to complete the college complaints/appeals procedure?

- The vast majority of complaints are formally closed within 20 days, and in some cases where further dialogue with the Principal is required this can extend to a term.
- 3 months
- 6 months
- a year to my knowledge..sometimes they delay/ ignore and hope the people get bored..
- 6 months

7. How many stages does your college procedure have?

- 2 stages – 2 respondents
- 3 stages – 3 respondents
- 4 stages – 5 respondents

8. Can a student present his/her case in person?

Answer Options	Response (per cent)	Response Count
Yes	100.0%	14
No	0.0%	0

9. Can a friend/representative of the student accompany them and present the case on their behalf?

Answer Options	Response (per cent)	Response Count
Yes	85.7%	12
No	14.3%	2

10. Are you aware of students being afraid of making a complaint or making an appeal due to how it may affect their relationship with staff?

Answer Options	Response (per cent)	Response Count
Yes	60.0%	9
No	40.0%	6

11. How widespread do you think this is?

Answer Options	Response (per cent)	Response Count
Not at all	0.0%	0
Not very	50.0%	7
Reasonably	50.0%	7
Very	0.0%	0

12. Does your institution record the number of complaints?

Answer Options	Response (per cent)	Response Count
Yes	73.3%	11
No	6.7%	1
Don't know	20.0%	3
If yes, how many were there in the last year of available data?		8

If yes how many were there in the last year of available data?

- 5
- 176
- 13
- 30
- It only records complaints when they get to stage three (formal). 64 complaints recorded 2009-2010.

13. Is a regular report on complaints/appeals made to one of the main bodies of the college (e.g. to Board of Governors)?

Answer Options	Response (per cent)	Response Count
Yes	78.6%	11
No	21.4%	3
If yes, to which body and how often?		3

If yes, to which body and how often?

- Governance & Quality (subcommittee of the board) in annual quality report
- College Management Team
- Quality, Standards and Procedures on termly basis
- Governors, quality and standards committee
- Governing Body - twice yearly

- Corporate Group Governors
- Governing body: Learning & Performance Committee
- Senior Management Team and Governing Body
- Board of Governors at least annually.

14. Does your college outline changes that it will make to the procedure following any cases that are upheld?

- Changes are made to the complaints procedure as per the timescale for updating policies, and take into account improvements required as a result of upheld complaints.

- Yes x6
- No x1
- Not aware of any x3

15. Do you consider your college complaints procedure to be transparent, fair and just?

Answer Options	Response (per cent)	Response Count
Yes	35.7%	5
In the majority of cases	21.4%	3
In some cases	35.7%	5
No	7.1%	1
If no, why not?		1

If not, why not?

- It is not particularly transparent, I was not really aware of it and neither were some other staff and students.

16. Has your college reviewed their complaints or appeals procedures in the last 18 months?

Answer Options	Response (per cent)	Response Count
Yes	50.0%	7
No	21.4%	3
Don't know	28.6%	4

17. If yes, was the students' union involved in this process?

Answer Options	Response (per cent)	Response Count
Yes	25.0%	3
No	75.0%	9

18. Where are you studying?

Wales – go to q19

England – continue to q 20

19. Should students be able to appeal against the college's decision to an independent body beyond the college?

Answer Options	Response (per cent)	Response Count
Yes	71.4%	5
No	0.0%	0
Sometimes	28.6%	2
Don't know	0.0%	0

20. How aware are students that they are able to take their complaint to a body beyond their college?

Answer Options	Response (per cent)	Response Count
Not at all	42.9%	3
Slightly aware	57.1%	4
Reasonably well	0.0%	0
Fully	0.0%	0

21. Does the college publicise this external appeal during the complaints process?

Answer Options	Response (per cent)	Response Count
Yes	14.3%	1
No	42.9%	3
Sometimes	14.3%	1
Don't know	28.6%	2

22. If students were aware do you think that they would look to use this external redress?

Answer Options	Response (per cent)	Response Count
No	0.0%	0
Sometimes	85.7%	6
Often	14.3%	1
Always	0.0%	0

Appendix 3 – Mapping exercise: Wales

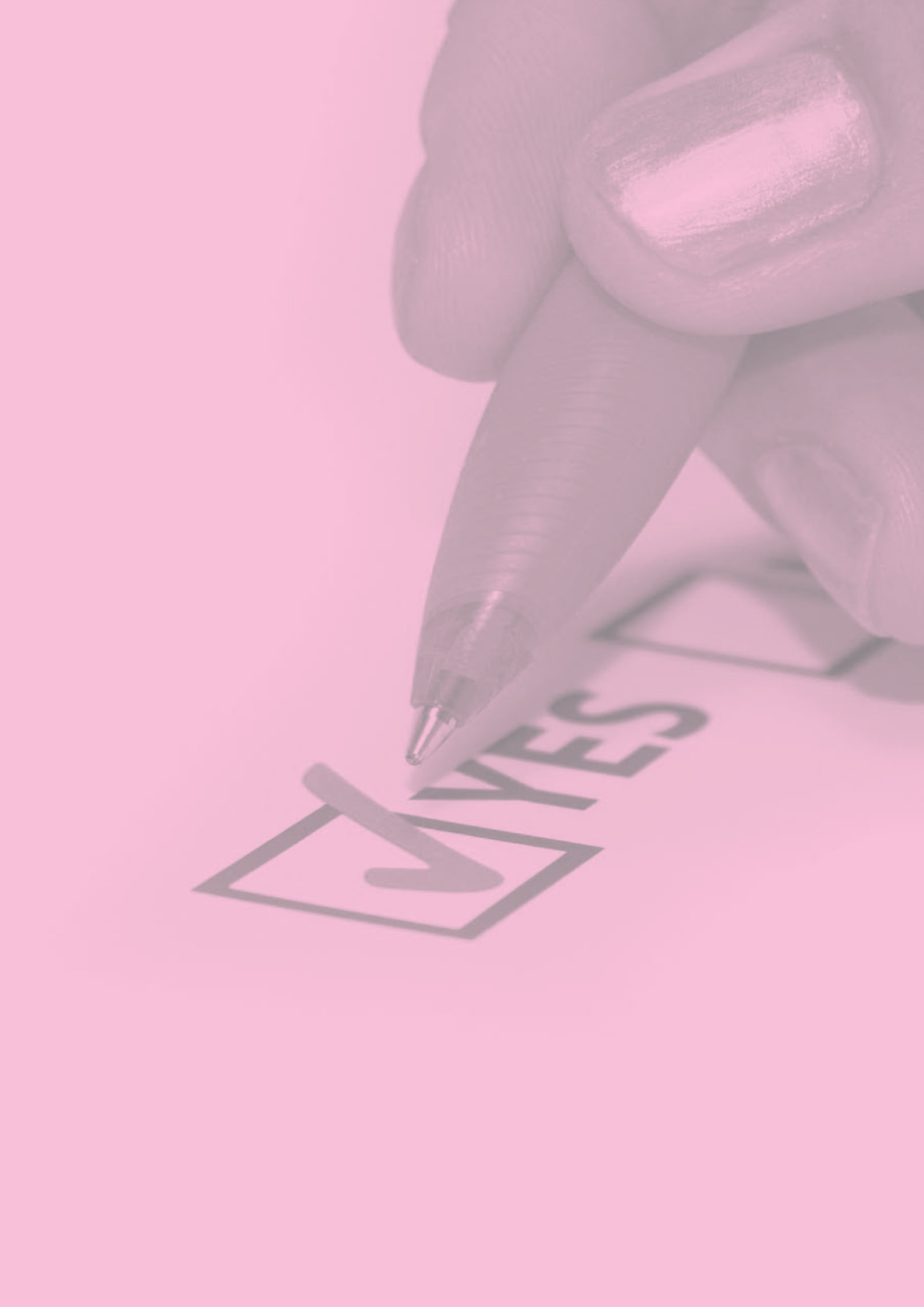
Mentioned principles in procedure process	Student/teacher confidentiality	Perceived independence	External support	Outcome reporting	Reviewing procedures	Any differences?
Barry College	No Complaints Procedures document available					
Bridgend College	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Suggested	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	N/A
Coleg Ceredigion	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Use of graphics
Coleg Glan Hafren	Mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Mentions of other policy document
Ystrad Mynach College	Not mentioned	Mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Annually	Use of E-form for complaints
Coleg Harlech/WEA (North Wales)	Mentioned	Mentioned	Suggested	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	College has 'Complaints officer'
Coleg Llandrillo	Mentioned	Mentioned	Suggested	Not mentioned	Annually	Bilingual in English and Welsh
Deeside College (Coleg Llysfasi)	Mentioned	Mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Annually	Bilingual in English and Welsh
Coleg Llandrillo (Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor)	Mentioned	Mentioned	Suggested	Not mentioned	Annually	Bilingual in English and Welsh
Coleg Menai	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Use of E-form for complaints

Mentioned principles in procedure process	Student/teacher confidentiality	Perceived independence	External support	Outcome reporting	Reviewing procedures	Any differences?
Coleg Gwent	No Complaints Procedures document available					
Coleg Powys	Mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Biennially	Complaints form in the PDF
Coleg Sir Gâr	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	N/A
Deeside College	Mentioned	Mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Annually	Bilingual in English and Welsh
Gower College Swansea	Mentioned	Mentioned (BEST)	Suggested	Not mentioned	Mentioned	Use of graphics
Merthyr Tydfil College (University of Glamorgan)	No Complaints Procedures document available					
Neath Port Talbot College	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Mentioned	Biennially	Monitoring of complaints and outcomes
Pembrokeshire College	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Mentioned	Biennially	Monitoring of complaints and outcomes
St David's Catholic College	Mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Complaints form in the PDF
Yale College	Mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	N/A
Coleg Morgannwg	Mentioned	Mentioned	Suggested	Not mentioned	Annually	N/A
YMCA	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	N/A
WEA South	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Mentioned	Rigorous complaints practice

Endnotes

¹ Skills Funding Agency (2012), *Procedure for dealing with complaints about Providers of Education and Training*. Available at: readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/SFA/Procedure_for_dealing_with_complaints_about_providers_-_Updated_March_2012.pdf [14/03/2012]

² NUS (2009) *NUS Review of Institutional Complaints and Appeals Procedures*. Available at: www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/highereducation/Complaints-Report [14/03/2012]





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