

University: Bournemouth University

General

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current system for handling student complaints about HEIs?

Strengths

We feel that the scheme offers independence and that on the whole, the OIA investigations are thorough and fair. Where a complaint is not upheld, we feel that this endorses that we have dealt with the issues in a fair and appropriate manner.

Weaknesses

It can take some time to resolve some complaints and clearly it would be helpful if this could be reduced where possible.

There is also the possibility that the OIA could undermine the HE's judgement as to whether to not to not accept a complaint or appeal as it is out of time, and also the judgement on the applicability of mitigating circumstances and it is important to recognise that the HEI, as a self governing body, must be allowed to have autonomy over these aspects whilst ensuring that students are treated fairly.

2. Is the current Scheme an improvement on previous arrangements?

Yes. As a post-92 HEI we were not previously subject to the visitor scheme and there was therefore no independent view in respect of appeals and complaints.

3. Has the existence of the OIA improved the way in which HEIs engage with students in the areas of student complaints and appeals?

We believe that it has raised the profile of appeals and complaints processes and, rightly, caused HEIs to review these to ensure that they are fair. It has also increased 'professionalism' in respect of complaints and appeals handling.

Funding of the Scheme

4. Is the current funding model appropriate? If not, are there alternative funding arrangements you would suggest?

Yes

Remit

5. Is there a public interest in the OIA developing its remit, for example by:

a) including students studying for foundation degrees at Further Education Colleges?

Yes. They are already included where the students are also HE students.

b) reviewing individual complaints about pre-registration admissions?

We have not debated this within the University and we have mixed views. There could be some benefits, however there are already proposals about how best to provide admissions feedback and it would be important to ensure that these dovetail.

c) including in the Scheme non qualifying institutions such as private degree awarding bodies?

This would depend upon the individual body. If introduced, as they are likely to be a for profit organisation, they should be subject to a higher fee.

Accessibility

6. Do you think that the current mechanisms for making students aware of OIA processes are adequate? What improvements, if any, would you suggest? Are there specific areas where students are not aware that they can bring a complaint?

We believe that the student group as a whole is more aware of its rights and responsibilities and more inclined to pursue a complaint or appeal than previously was the case. However we do not believe that the student population are particularly aware of the OIA until they start to pursue a complaint/appeal with the HEI.

7. Do the existing arrangements ensure that the OIA is sufficiently accessible for students to make a complaint? How might the OIA improve its website and communications?

We believe that current provision is adequate.

Efficiency and Effectiveness

8. How might the OIA increase its operational efficiency and improve the timeliness of decision making?

Perhaps more staff but this would clearly have resource issues.

9. Do you have any comments about the way in which the OIA reviews complaints or about the quality and consistency of its decisions?

In some cases, the named contact has felt that the OIA were asking for information that was outside the remit of the complaint, and the rationale was not always clear. However in the vast majority of cases we believe that decisions are appropriate and consistent.

10. Are existing OIA processes sufficiently user friendly and transparent?

We believe so. Ultimately this is a complaints process, and one does not wish to encourage spurious complaints or time-wasters.

11. Do you have any suggestions for amending the OIA Rules to increase effectiveness?

No

Impact

12. Does the OIA offer effective and appropriate remedies for students whose complaints are upheld?

Yes

13. Should OIA adjudications be published?

Yes, anonymously. This will help to demonstrate the OIA's impartiality, clarify the types of outcomes that complainants may achieve, and ensure that HEIs can compare best practice.

14. How might the OIA share better its knowledge and experience of complaints handling and promote good practice?

Via regular reports and workshops as at present. Possibly the addition of regular bulletins and/or website updates.

Governance

15. Is the independence and impartiality of the Scheme safeguarded sufficiently?

Yes. In particular all OIA staff are extremely professional in their outlook. However we accept that some students see the OIA complaints processes as an extension of the university process, which could give the impression of the OIA being 'on the side of the University'.

16. Is the present composition of the Board appropriate? Should there be additional student representation?

Current composition is appropriate.

17. Have you anything further to add?

No further comments.