

University: Buckinghamshire New University

General

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

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

The OIA scheme is not felt to be an improvement on the arrangements that previously prevailed here. Bucks deployed its own independent adjudicator who heard about three/four cases during their term, and did so effectively. This was also true at London Guildhall University which shared with other London institutions a panel of adjudicators (registrars) who heard each other's cases and resolved them incisively.

However, it is the positive view of Bucks New University that at present the OIA's judgements are being delivered more speedily, are more consistent and coincide with our own views of the cases, in comparison with the OIA's early track record.

OIA is bound to take a formal forensic approach. It does not always recognise the practicalities of institutional life and it sometimes dents its own image in seeming to be less than reasonable about timescales and other matters.

OIA has not particularly improved our internal approach to complaints other than in the issuing of clearer internal decision letters.

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

Funding of the Scheme

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

Yes, a nominal student contribution should be considered. Yes, a higher payment by institutions whose student complaints are upheld could be considered, but we don't feel strongly.

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?

Directly funded HE courses in FE colleges and HE courses run by private providers (though entailing no public subsidy) could usefully be included in the scheme.

b) reviewing individual complaints about pre-registration admissions?

Yes we would support a strong objection to the inclusion of pre-admission complaints.

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

Directly funded HE courses in FE colleges and HE courses run by private providers (though entailing no public subsidy) could usefully be included in the scheme.

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?**

- 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?**

Efficiency and Effectiveness

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

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

We feel quite strongly that 'justified in part' does not recognise the case where the University is guilty of a minor technicality or shortcoming in its handling of a complaint. The words 'minor technicality' or 'minor shortcoming' could be used in the OIA's written judgements in our view.

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

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

Impact

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

13. Should OIA adjudications be published?

Public information is good. Institutions could be named so long as complaining students, and individual employees who are complained about, are protected.

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

The OIA appears to do a reasonable job in disseminating its work and we would not want this to become more expensive, nor indeed more prescriptive about our involvement. We believe that students are adequately informed about the existence of the OIA, though most do not of course avail themselves of its services. In sum, we do not want any mandatory extra work, though generally approve of the developmental approach being taken by OIA.

Governance

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

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

The OIA Board appears well-balanced as it is and able to sustain the independence of the scheme.

17. Have you anything further to add?