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PRESS NOTICE: ANNUAL REPORT 2008

Rob Behrens, Independent Adjudicator and Chief Executive of the OIA presented his Annual Report for 2008 at the OIA's first Annual Open meeting on Tuesday 19 May 2009.

Rob Behrens, reported that the main features of performance were:

- The number of complaints received by the OIA in 2008 was 900. This is a significant (23 per cent) rise compared to 2007, and continues the year-on-year rises recorded since 2005.
- In 2008 there was a 17 per cent reduction in the average number of days taken to deal with an eligible complaint (171 days to 142 days).
- At the end of 2008 the OIA had received 15 Judicial Review applications since its inception. Of these, none has succeeded. This constitutes important external endorsement for the rigour of OIA adjudication (3 new claims were received during 2008).
- The overwhelming proportion of complaints received in 2008 concerned academic status issues, that is issues outside academic judgment (where the OIA has no remit) but concerned with processes related to academic appeals, the handling of mitigating circumstances, and academic misconduct issues including plagiarism.
- Most complainants are students of Business Administration, subjects allied to Medicine (particularly Nursing) and Law.
- Of the eligible complaints reviewed in 2008:
 - 7 per cent were Justified (11 per cent in 2007),
 - 16 per cent were Partly Justified (15 per cent in 2007)
 - 71 per cent were Not Justified (65 per cent in 2007).

Commenting on the Annual Report Rob Behrens said:

“Universities should be encouraged by the relatively small number of complaints found Justified. However, there is no room for complacency. During the year I came across unacceptable instances of serious delay in handling formal complaints, examples of insensitive handling and universities failing to abide by their own regulations.”

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He also commented that:

“It is clear there is a need for improved practice in a number of subject areas, including:

- The handling of Plagiarism issues where practice is variable;
- Effective supervision of postgraduate students in the run-up to thesis submission;
- Disability practice, particularly the legislative requirement to make “reasonable adjustments” for disabled students; and
- Fitness to Practise issues where students must demonstrate additional competences associated with professional qualifications.”

It is important to contextualise these figures by noting that OIA only accepts complaints once internal HEI processes are exhausted, and that there are 1.9 million students enrolled at HEIs in England and Wales covered by the Scheme.

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Notes to Editors

1. The OIA is the designated operator of the Scheme for reviewing student complaints, established under the Higher Education Act 2004.
2. The OIA has a wide remit to examine student complaints about ‘the omissions and commissions’ of HEIs. It does not examine issues of academic judgment or admissions issues. The Scheme Rules and all details related to OIA operations can be found at www.oiahe.org.uk