

Press Release - Monday 14 April 2008

Student complaints on the rise – the reasons to be examined at conference “Universities, students and justice”, Canary Wharf (offices of Clifford Chance) 15-17 April 2008

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) will announce in its Annual Report for 2007 that the number of complaints it has received by students against universities has risen for the third consecutive year.

- In 2007 applications to the OIA rose by 25% from 586 in 2006 to 734
- 26% of complaints were upheld to some extent, up slightly from 2006
- £173,000 compensation was recommended to be paid to complainants
- 36% of the complainants were postgraduates (although only 23% of UK students are postgraduates) and 64% were over 25 years old.
- The average time taken by the OIA to close a complaint is 6 months.
- 64% of the complaints related to academic results; disciplinary matters and plagiarism accounted for 11%. Students in subjects allied to medicine (but excluding medicine) formed the largest group of complainants.

The OIA conference (on behalf of the European Network of Ombudsmen in Higher Education) will call for universities to make adjustments to cater for the new student population, which is older, more likely to be graduate and from overseas, and less familiar with university life. It will call for universities to settle complaints more speedily and informally, for example by setting up “campus ombudsmen” and having simpler complaints and appeals procedures.

There will be over 150 delegates from 20 countries; speakers include:

- Bill Rammell, Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education
- Lord Dearing, author of the report Higher Education in the Learning Society
- Filip van Depoele, coordinator of the ERASMUS programme, European Commission
- Baroness Blackstone, vice-chancellor University of Greenwich
- Wes Streeting, President-elect of the National Union of Students

For attendance at the conference and information about the OIA contact Charlotte Wootton on 01189 599813, charlotte.wootton@oiahe.org.uk.