



office of the
independent
adjudicator

PN 915

Press Notice: The Pathway Report

STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 on 11 February 2010

In a wide-ranging review of the OIA's mandate and operations begun in autumn 2008, Rob Behrens, the Independent Adjudicator and Chief Executive, today publishes **The Pathway Report** setting out 28 Recommendations for developing the Scheme in the next five years. The Report also identifies 10 'Quick Wins' already being implemented. The OIA Board has unanimously adopted the Report, the Recommendations, the 'Quick Wins' and the implementation strategy.

Introducing the Report, Rob Behrens stated:

“Following extensive consultation with universities, students' unions, complainants, and stakeholder groups it is clear there is widespread endorsement of the mandate of the OIA Scheme as set out in the 2004 Higher Education Act and its consequent operation. There is acknowledgement of the Scheme's independence and effectiveness and of the high quality of its formal decisions as an alternative to costly litigation.

But there is much still to be done and we have set out a programme of change to build on the success of the formative period of the Office.

First, the OIA will develop a costed strategy for communicating more effectively its role and function to remove uncertainties in user perception uncovered in the course of consultation.

Second, we will review key areas of operational practice - direct contact with users, disability policy and practice, available remedies, funding arrangements, and the handling of compliance issues. This is to ensure that we continue to learn from good practice in the areas of accessibility, proportionality, efficiency and transparency.

Third, there is support for incremental changes to the mandate, which can be delivered through amendment to the Scheme Rules without a change to the law. This includes allowing private universities to become eligible for membership of the Scheme, and this will now happen. The OIA will consult further on the possibility of Further Education Colleges offering their own Foundation Degrees becoming eligible

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for membership. In addition, and crucially, the OIA will also consult further about how to increase the transparency of the Scheme, including the option of publishing summaries of formal decisions in line with good practice in counterpart schemes.”

Chair Ram Gidoomal commented:

“The Board is delighted that the Pathway consultation has led to such a constructive and useful set of outcomes. The Report demonstrates that as the higher education sector grapples with severe financial crisis, all parts of it – universities, students unions and complainants - can be confident that the OIA is listening to emerging needs and responding to them in evidence-based fashion and with rigour, independence and sensitivity.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors

1. The Pathway Report and this Press Notice are **STRICTLY EMBARGOED** until 00:01 on 11 February 2010.
2. The Pathway Project began in October 2008.
3. The OIA received 91 submissions from universities, 15 from students' unions and a further 19 from key stakeholders to the Issues and Questions Paper. There were also individual submissions from university staff members and members of the public.
4. An independent survey of complainants was commissioned in September 2008 and was undertaken by researchers in the King's Institute for the Study of Public Policy (KISPP) at King's College London from 1 December 2008 to 30 June 2009.
5. The OIA is the designated operator of the Scheme for reviewing student complaints, established under the Higher Education Act 2004.
6. The OIA has a wide remit to review student complaints about an 'act or omission' of HEIs in England and Wales. It does not review academic judgment or admissions issues. The Scheme Rules and all details related to OIA operations can be found at www.oiahe.org.uk.