



office of the
independent
adjudicator

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OIA Launches Report in Response to Pathway 3 Consultation on Early Complaints Resolution

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) is today publishing its response to the '*Pathway 3 Consultation - Towards Early Resolution and Effective Complaints Handling*' as requested in the Government's Higher Education White Paper, *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System* (Cm 8122, June 2011). The Pathway 3 Consultation sought views from across the Higher Education sector and beyond on effective strategies to promote the early resolution of complaints and appeals and better all-round complaints handling in universities.

The Report's **headline actions** are:

1. **The construction of a series of Campus Pilots on Early Resolution**, run by universities and students' unions and coordinated by the OIA. These six-month pilots, to be launched in early 2013, include the testing and/or development of a range of Early Resolution initiatives including Mediation and resource-sharing between universities and/or universities and students' unions for informal complaint resolution;
2. **The construction of a sector wide, evidence-based, voluntary, Good Practice Framework**, including time targets for resolution, focusing on complaints-related and appeals resolution issues. This will complement the QAA's UK Quality Code;
3. The adoption of **a revised funding model for the OIA** in the context of significant annual increases in complaints, further predicted rises, and a growing diversity of institutions, public and private, joining the Scheme. The revised model, to be introduced over two years (in 2013 and 2014) will supplement the current subscription based on numbers of enrolled students with a small case-related element (initially expected to be around 10 per cent of OIA income). This will retain as far as possible the simplicity and transparency of the current model, but also attempt to make the model more equitable. The OIA will keep the revised system under very close review.

Rob Behrens, Independent Adjudicator and Chief Executive, commented:

"Given the steady rise in complaints received annually at the OIA, the early resolution of complaints on campus is a key strategic issue for the sector. The steps we have outlined will provide a better information base for complaints handling and also incentivise universities to resolve complaints – where possible – before they reach the OIA"

Notes to editors

1. To arrange an interview with the OIA, please contact Charlotte Corrish, Policy and Communications Manager, by emailing charlotte.corrish@oiahe.org.uk or by phone on 0118 959 2733
2. The OIA is the designated operator of the Scheme for reviewing student complaints in England and Wales, established under the Higher Education Act 2004. All universities in England and Wales belong to the Scheme.
3. The OIA has a wide remit to review student complaints about an 'act or omission' by 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

BACKGROUND

Key issues in the Pathway 3 Consultation included consideration of:

- Whether or not to create campus ombudsmen, and associated support networks;
- The development of mediation on campus;
- The creation of a good practice framework for complaints and appeals processes including the incorporation of effective time-frames for handling,
- The possible development of an OIA 'kite-mark' accreditation;
- The introduction of a revised funding mechanism for the OIA Scheme which contains a case-related element.

1 October 2012