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Handling student complaints

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) has published good practice guidance to support universities and colleges dealing with complaints and academic appeals by students in higher education.

The *Good Practice Framework for Handling Complaints and Academic Appeals* sets down for the first time the core principles and processes that together support fair and effective management of student complaints and academic appeals.

The new framework has been prepared by a steering group, led by the OIA and including the Academic Registrars' Council, the National Union of Students, the Association of Heads of University Administration and the Quality Assurance Agency. It follows extensive consultation with universities and students' unions over the last 18 months.

Rob Behrens, the Independent Adjudicator and Chief Executive at the OIA, said:

"Most students go through their entire time at university without needing to complain or lodge an academic appeal. For those who do run into difficulties the framework ensures that there are effective means of redress. It is important that there are proper arrangements in place that allow students to bring issues to the right people, who can look at what has happened and why and work to find the right resolution. The Good Practice Framework will support this by making guidance available to institutions on setting up and running complaints and academic appeals processes."

The framework outlines elements of complaints handling including:

- Early resolution
- Establishing and sticking to clear timescales
- Clarity
- Fairness and independence
- Using complaints and academic appeals to improve services to students

"There is no blue print for dealing with complaints and appeals," said Rob Behrens. "Each university needs to set up processes that work for its students. The purpose of the Framework is to indicate the essential components of those processes, drawn together from established good practice. I have been encouraged by the wide support for the framework that has come through during the consultation period and look forward to seeing it adopted by universities and students' unions."

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. The Good Practice Framework for Handling Complaints and Academic Appeals will be published on the OIA website on Friday 12 December 2014. For an advance copy please contact oa@oiahe.org.uk
2. The framework provides an overview of key factors to include in effective complaints and academic appeals processes.
3. The OIA will refer to the framework in considering complaints and academic appeals from students about issues that first arise during or after the academic year 2015-2016.
4. The framework applies in England and Wales to institutions that belong to the OIA Scheme.
5. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) is the student ombudsman for England and Wales. It deals with complaints and academic appeals from current and former registered students at universities and colleges that belong to the OIA Scheme.
6. For further details or to speak to the Independent Adjudicator please contact Jane Clarkson, jane.clarkson@oiahe.org.uk, 0118 9599813.