



## Improvements to the OIA process – update April 2015

Within the OIA we are currently undertaking a review of our process and will be making a number of changes in order to improve efficiencies that will:

- Reduce average case turnaround times whilst safeguarding the standard of our decisions.
- Reduce the number of unallocated cases (particularly those cases requiring full review).
- Improve the user experience and our efficiency in handling complaints.

### Information Requests and providing information to the OIA

During the initial stages of our process we request information from universities in order to build a complaint file. Universities' submissions vary widely in format and we are often asked for guidance on how to present submissions.

We recognise that information requests need to be proportionate and individual to the circumstances of a case, however, we need to ensure that we are provided with the necessary information at the initial stage as this will prevent delays during our process by making additional requests for information at a later stage.

We are therefore working on guidance on providing information to the OIA which will include requests for information to be provided in a logically ordered PDF and for communication to be limited to electronic submissions. We are also considering introducing a checklist for universities to complete before returning information requests to us. This approach will enable us to review submissions more efficiently, to determine easily whether any information is missing, and to assess whether the complaint file is "complete" in accordance with the requirements of the EU ADR Directive.

### Timescales

We are currently reviewing the deadlines the OIA sets when requesting information from universities and students to make sure we are balancing the need to have access to everything we require to review a case with the need to progress cases as quickly as possible. We recognise that we need to be proportionate and flexible in the amount of time we provide universities and students to respond.

The OIA will therefore be making changes to these timeframes taking into account the complexity of complaints and the quantity of information being requested on an individual basis. We consider that these changes will allow for more straightforward complaints and prioritised complaints to be reviewed more effectively.

INDEPENDENT ADJUDICATOR & CHIEF EXECUTIVE – ROBERT BEHRENS



## **Extensions**

While we acknowledge that it is sometimes difficult for universities and students to meet the deadlines we set, requests for extensions and late responses result in longer case-handling times. We will therefore be revising our approach to providing extensions by taking into account the circumstances of an extension request including the reasons for such a request, what we consider constitutes a reasonable period of extension and introducing a policy that would outline our approach in respect of certain periods such as public holidays.

As part of our review into extension requests, we will also be improving the way in which we analyse extension information in order to identify any issues with either a university's timeliness or repeated and routine extension requests. We will be analysing responses and communicating with universities in order to establish whether there are any particular issues that we should be aware of and record information regarding the average time taken and the number of extensions requested in comparison to other similar sized institutions. We anticipate that this will be a useful exercise which will improve case-handling time and will be useful to universities to identify if additional resources are needed to handle complaints.

## **University Regulations**

The OIA has a library of regulations and we request regulations from institutions on an annual basis. This is to reduce any duplicate requests being made to universities. However, we have identified a number of regulations that we do not have which results in case-handlers making requests on an individual basis which is inefficient.

We will therefore be reviewing our library of regulations and may contact universities on an individual basis or in our annual requests for any regulations that we do not have and that we regularly refer to in reviewing cases.