



office of the
independent
adjudicator

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More than 2,000 student complaints reviewed in 2014.

The OIA closed 2,175 complaints from higher education students in 2014. The majority (61 per cent) were from students who had appealed unsuccessfully at their university against marks, progression between years and final decisions on degree classification or postgraduate qualification. The second largest cause for complaint (15 per cent) was service issues, covering student complaints that the course or facilities did not meet expectations set out in the prospectus, concerns about resources and issues relating to postgraduate supervision.

In 500 cases the OIA either settled the case between the higher education provider and the student, or found the complaint Justified or Partly Justified.

The number of new complaints received was 2,040, a slight increase on the previous record year, 2012, when 2,012 new cases were brought to the OIA.

Commenting on the figures, the Independent Adjudicator and Chief Executive of the OIA, Rob Behrens, said:

“The annual report demonstrates the importance of an independent ombudsman service for students. OIA case-handlers look at every single complaint that students send to us. Of more than 2,000 cases closed last year, 500 were found at least partially in favour of the student. Depending on the case this may lead to the student being given a second chance to submit work or appeal against a decision; cancellation of a penalty imposed by a university; or financial compensation, which in 2014 reached almost £400,000. As importantly, the report shows that overall universities are doing a thorough job in dealing with the majority of complaints fairly.”

The value of learning from good practice is a key theme in the report. Four universities have provided case studies of how they are working to implement the Good Practice Framework for Handling Complaints and Academic Appeals.

The report looks ahead to the expansion of the OIA Scheme to include higher education students in further education colleges, alternative providers and providers offering School-Centred Initial Teacher Training.

Rob Behrens added:

“The OIA now has experience of reviewing more than 10,000 complaints in the ten years since we were set up. It is hugely encouraging – and long overdue – that under the Consumer Rights Act 2015 from this September almost all higher education students in England and Wales will be able to bring unresolved issues to the OIA.”

ENDS

INDEPENDENT ADJUDICATOR & CHIEF EXECUTIVE – ROBERT BEHRENS

The OIA is a charity, registered in England & Wales under number 1141289, and a company limited by guarantee, registered in England & Wales under number 4823842

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Notes to Editors

1. For further information or to arrange an interview with the Independent Adjudicator, Rob Behrens, please contact jane.clarkson@oiahe.org.uk.
2. The annual report will be published on Thursday 18 June on the OIA website, www.oiahe.org.uk.
3. The main points in the annual report are:
 - The OIA received 2,040 new complaints in 2014 (1,972 in 2013; 2,012 in 2012)
 - The OIA closed 2,175 complaints in 2014
 - 23 per cent of cases were either settled (eight per cent); Partly Justified (ten per cent) or Justified (5 per cent)
 - 14 per cent of cases were not eligible for review by the OIA, typically because they were out of time, a student had not completed internal procedures, or the complaint fell out our remit. This is down from 16 per cent in 2013.
 - 59 per cent of cases were found Not Justified (55 per cent in 2013).
 - The biggest complaint categories were academic status (61 per cent); service issues (15 per cent) and financial issues (seven per cent).
 - Financial awards were made to more than 200 students, totalling almost £400,000.
 - The report includes case studies from Birmingham City University, the University of Sunderland, Teesside University and the University of Warwick on using the Good Practice Framework to amend university procedures.
 - The report includes examples of cases where the OIA has made recommendations following its review of a student's complaint.
 - It also includes common reasons why complaints are not found Justified, including where students have clearly broken regulations or failed to provide evidence to support their case.
 - There are a number of case examples to illustrate how the OIA can deal with cases relating to academic status and academic misconduct, including plagiarism.
4. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) resolves complaints and academic appeals from students in higher education studying at providers in England and Wales.
5. Under the Consumer Rights Act 2015 higher education providers including further education colleges, alternative providers and School Centred Initial Teacher Training providers (SCITTS) will join the OIA Scheme on September 1 2015, giving their students access to the OIA's service.