



office of the
independent
adjudicator

Operating Report

2025

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Introduction

Our charitable purpose underpins our organisation: to advance education for public benefit by providing an independent, impartial and expert review of student complaints in England and Wales, and by using what we learn to support fairer policies and practices across higher education. In 2025, this purpose continued to guide not only how we make decisions in individual cases, but also how we contribute to the wider system that shapes students' experiences.

Our strategy sets out four priorities through which we fulfil that purpose and move towards our vision of a higher education sector in which students are always treated fairly. This Operating Report reflects on the progress we made during 2025 against the commitments in our 2025 [Operating Plan](#), highlighting both ongoing programmes of work and initiatives introduced in response to new challenges and opportunities.

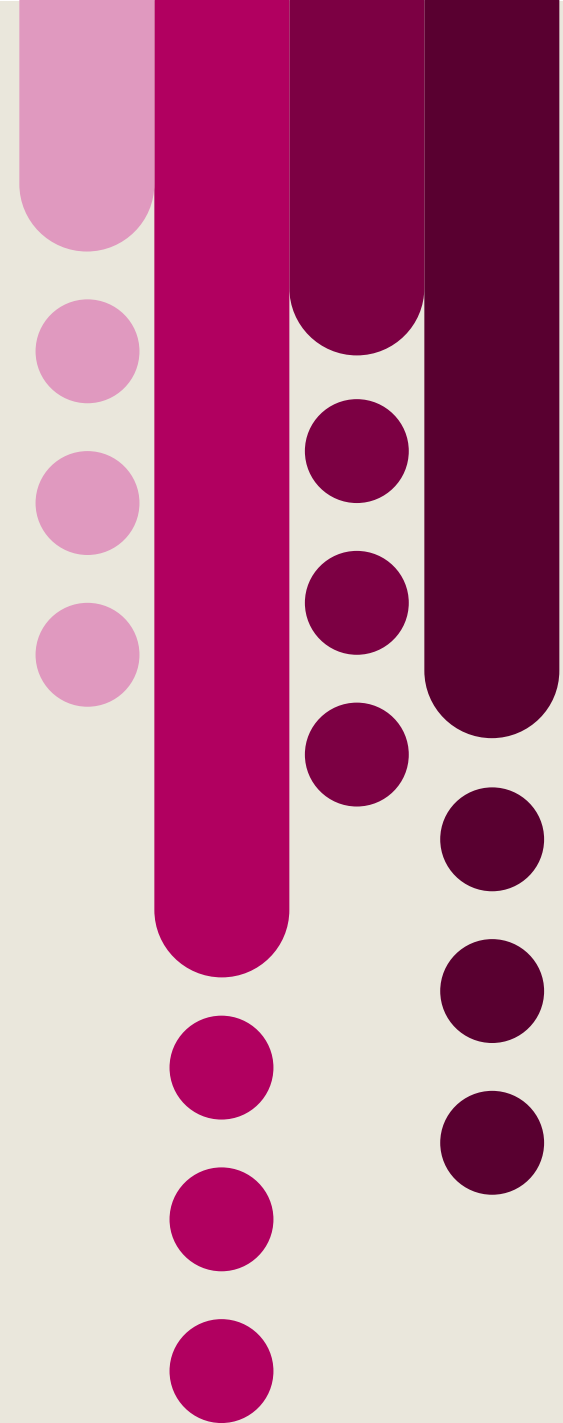
The calendar year 2025 highlighted was a year of both continuity and change for students and providers. A new government brought further attention to the student experience, complaints and redress, and the wider regulatory landscape. At the same time, the pressures that have shaped the sector in recent years continued to be strongly felt: financial constraints, workforce challenges, rising student needs and heightened expectations around fairness and transparency. Against this backdrop, we once again saw high levels of demand for our service, with sustained increases in case receipts and indications that further rises remain likely.

We responded with pace and with purpose. Throughout the year we focused on making our Scheme accessible, timely and responsive to all students who could benefit from it, adapting our processes where appropriate and investing in new ways of working that support efficiency without compromising the quality or independence of our decisions. We continued to embed our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion not just in what we do, but in how we do it, strengthening the way we communicate with students, reviewing the accessibility of our systems, and deepening the cultural competence of our workforce.

Our good practice work continued to grow in reach and sophistication. As an independent but integral part of the regulatory system, we expanded the ways in which learning from complaints informs improvement across the sector. We provided clear insights, more thematic analysis and more practical tools to help providers understand where policies and processes support fairness, and where they do not. This influence continued to be recognised by our stakeholders, and we strengthened our partnerships across the higher education landscape to ensure that fairness for students remains a shared responsibility.

We also developed as an organisation. Throughout 2025 we invested in our people, systems and culture to build long-term capacity and resilience. We took a more strategic approach to learning and development, advanced our digital and data capabilities, and worked to ensure that our organisational structure supports consistency, quality and continuous improvement. These internal developments underpin the impact we can make externally: they enable us to remain agile, outward-looking and focused on making a positive difference for students and the sector.

Taken together, the work set out in this report demonstrates how we are evolving our service, strengthening our influence and preparing for the future, while remaining firmly grounded in our charitable purpose. Our focus on fairness, independence and learning continues to guide us as we contribute to an increasingly complex higher education landscape.



Testimonials from students who have used the Scheme

“I wanted to say how much I appreciate the time and care you’ve taken with my case. Your communication has been so clear and considerate throughout, and I’m really grateful for the way you’ve handled everything”

Student feedback, November 2025

“I wanted to express my sincerest gratitude and appreciation for the review of my complaint. I recognise the substantial work that has gone into this and I am so very grateful that you have conducted this review in a highly professional and methodical way that really captures my experience and just how difficult it has been for me. It was a very emotional read for me - to be heard and understood in such a way has felt very powerful and moving. Thank you ever so much.”

Student feedback, September 2025

“[...] though you may hear this often, you have been a saviour in these final weeks of the long complaint process. It’s a relief that students have a body, such as the OIA, and staff like yourself to support those in the dark [...]”

Student feedback, April 2025

“I truly appreciate your support and understand the time and energy you’re dedicating to reaching a fair resolution....”

Student feedback, March 2025



A year in numbers for the OIA

4,234

Number of complaints received
(Total number of enquiries received:
5,626)

3,950

Number of complaints resolved
by the OIA

20%

Percentage of favourable
outcomes* for students

50%

Percentage of Not Justified
complaints

20%

Percentage of Not Eligible
complaints

9%

Percentage of complaints that
were terminated or withdrawn

1,009

Number of attendees at our
webinars

62

Number of service complaints
received by the OIA
(complaints about the service we have
provided)

*Favourable outcome decisions means cases which were Justified, Partly Justified or Settled according to our rules.

Why the OIA mattered in 2025

The work set out in this Operating Report shows an organisation that is not only meeting the demands placed upon it, but actively shaping the landscape in which those demands arise. In a year defined by rising pressures on students and providers, a shifting policy environment, and increasing expectations of transparency and fairness, the OIA has continued to fulfil a unique and vital role.

At its heart, our service provides something different from any other part of the higher education system: independent, expert redress for students who believe they have been treated unfairly. For many students, we represent the final opportunity to have their experience reviewed by a body that is impartial, accessible and trusted. For providers, our decisions and guidance illuminate where systems work well and where they need to improve. Our work helps protect the integrity of the relationship between students and their institutions, a relationship that is fundamental to the health of the sector.

The value of the OIA extends far beyond individual cases. Through our insight, our good practice work and our role in the wider regulatory framework, we help ensure that learning from complaints contributes to better policies, fairer processes and more consistent experiences for future students. We are uniquely placed to see not only where things have gone wrong, but what might prevent similar issues from arising again. That perspective is increasingly recognised across the sector, and it is why our influence continues to grow.

The developments we have made in 2025, strengthening our digital systems, deepening our engagement with governments and regulators, enhancing our outreach, investing in our people and improving the timeliness and quality of our service, all support one simple but important aim: to maximise the positive difference we can make.

We know that the pressures facing higher education are unlikely to diminish. We also know that fairness, transparency and independent oversight will matter more than ever in the years ahead. The OIA is committed to being a stable, trusted, and constructive part of that future. Our independence gives us clarity; our expertise gives us authority; and our charitable purpose keeps us focused on what ultimately matters: ensuring that students are treated fairly, and that the sector continues to learn and improve.

In a complex and changing environment, the OIA's role is both anchor and catalyst, anchoring fairness at the centre of student redress, and catalysing improvement across the sector. That is why our work matters, and why we will continue to build on the progress made in 2025 as we look to the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Our Strategy, objectives and priorities explained

Our overall strategy sets out objectives for the OIA. Our first objective is that we will be trusted to deliver fair decisions, to treat everyone equitably, to improve students' experiences, to listen and act independently, and to be reasonable. Related to this is that we will be valued for our expertise, integrity and efficiency.

Our second objective is to have impact so that the sector is better at handling complaints and using learning from complaints and wider experience to bring improvements.

Flowing from this we have four priority areas of work:

1. Casework
2. Stakeholder engagement
3. Strengthening our evidence base
4. Organisational and cultural development

A review of the work we carried out in relation to our priorities is set out in the following pages.

Priority 1:

We aimed to fundamentally review our casework process to ensure it has service users at its heart, is as efficient as possible and is focused on effective resolution and remedy.

The number of complaints brought to us has continued to rise year on year, contributing to a substantial and sustained increase in our overall caseload. This long-term upward trend reflects both the pressures facing students and providers, and the increasingly important role that independent redress plays in the higher education landscape. Managing this growth effectively has remained a central priority in 2025 and is critical to maintaining a service that students trust, can access easily, and experience as fair and responsive.

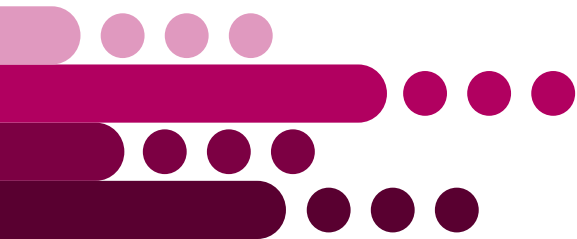
In 2025 we received 4,234 complaints, the highest number in our history and an increase of 17% compared with 2024. This continued the pattern of rises over the past seven consecutive years and required us to adapt dynamically throughout the year to ensure we could meet demand without compromising quality or independence.

We strengthened our focus on proactive caseload management and targeted our resources where they could make the greatest difference. As a result, we exceeded all of our timeliness key performance indicators (KPIs), despite the sustained growth in case receipts. We also made meaningful improvements to the age profile of our case-holding, with 93% of complaints under 6 months old and no cases over 12 months old, demonstrating greater consistency and control across the lifecycle of a complaint.

Alongside this, we significantly increased the number of complaints we were able to close, bringing 3,950 complaints to a conclusion, 8% more than in 2024. Our average time to close a case fell to 81 days, compared with 82 days last year and 125 days in 2023. This improvement reflects deliberate process enhancements, better use of data and digital systems, and the continued commitment of our staff to delivering a timely and accessible service even as caseloads expand.

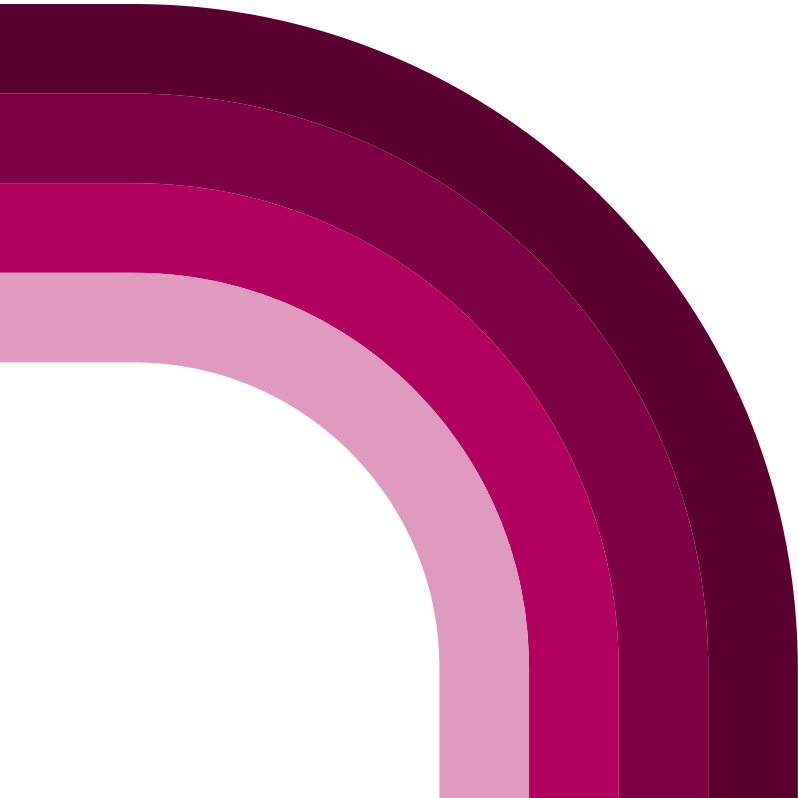
These outcomes show not only operational resilience but also the organisation's continuing evolution: adapting to rising demand, sharpening our approach to timeliness and quality, and ensuring that our decisions remain robust, fair and accessible to the students who depend on them.

What we planned to do	What this looked like	How we performed
<p>We said we would provide a timely service, responding promptly to enquiries, letting students know as soon as possible whether we can look at their complaint, and resolving complaints as quickly as we can.</p>	<p>Key performance indicators (KPIs) for the timeliness of our case-handling process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to 95% of enquiries within two working days • Making 90% of eligibility decisions (or requesting further information) within 10 working days • Closing 75% of cases within six months of receipt. 	<p>We exceeded our KPIs for the timeliness of our case-handling process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We responded to 98% of enquiries within two working days. • We made 95% of eligibility decisions (or requested further information), within 10 working days. • We closed 93% of cases within six months of receipt.
<p>We said we would use risk-based and proportionate quality assurance mechanisms to evaluate the quality of our processes and the decisions we reach, using what we learn to improve what we do.</p>	<p>Monitoring the quality of our decisions and feeding learning back into continuous development of our case-handling.</p> <p>Looking again at our casework processes to identify and implement further improvements.</p>	<p>We continued to monitor quality through various mechanisms, overseen by our Casework Quality Group.</p> <p>We used learning from quality assurance to inform the continuing development of our casework and to improve and update guidance for case-handlers.</p> <p>We continued to review and develop our case-handling resources. We embedded additional reporting tools to support greater data accuracy and to improve the timeliness of our data.</p>



What we planned to do	What this looked like	How we performed
<p>We said we will further develop our processes and systems to provide an accessible and inclusive service for students and providers.</p>	<p>Handling cases in a way that is responsive to both the needs of the individual student and the nature of the case.</p> <p>Supporting case-handlers to take a proportionate approach to each individual case and to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity.</p>	<p>We continued to take a flexible approach to the needs of students, particularly those whose needs were not met by our standard approach.</p> <p>We also took a new approach to supporting students to understand their behavioural contract with the OIA through updated policy.</p> <p>We looked for opportunities to resolve cases at an early stage. We built on the learning from previous and new initiatives to make further improvements to our case-handling processes.</p> <p>We listened to staff experiences through our externally led internal review of the Scheme's accessibility and inclusion with follow up discussion opportunities.</p>
<p>We said we will look for opportunities to settle cases whenever it is appropriate.</p>	<p>Trying to settle cases where this would be a reasonable and realistic potential outcome, meeting our KPI of settling 10% of our cases.</p>	<p>We tried to settle cases where we thought that would be the best way to resolve the complaint. We were successful in settling 13% of cases, exceeding our KPI.</p>
<p>We said we will continue to develop the skills of our case-handlers.</p>	<p>Providing support and training for case-handlers so that they are well equipped to review all cases allocated to them effectively and impartially.</p>	<p>We supported the continuing development of our case-handlers' skills and knowledge through an internal programme of case-handler-led sessions.</p> <p>We also embarked on a wide-ranging programme of activities to develop core competencies for case handling.</p>

What we planned to do	What this looked like	How we performed
<p>We will build on our capacity to feedback on learning from complaints to the sector, to promote good practice and improvement.</p>	<p>Developing our strategy to focus on delivering impact for students and the wider sector.</p> <p>Improving our systems for identifying, recording, and reporting on the drivers of complaints.</p>	<p>We developed an Engagement, Impact and Improvement Strategy to help us prioritise the activities that are most effective in targeting improved student access to fair processes and improving the culture of learning from complaints.</p> <p>We began to build new reporting tools to help us to quickly identify trends and systemic issues in the complaints we receive.</p>



Priority 2:

We aimed to increase the effectiveness of our influencing in support of our objectives.

In 2025 we continued the evolution of our good practice and outreach work, strengthening its reach, relevance, and impact across the sector. As the operating environment for providers and students becomes more complex, the role of well-evidenced, practical and timely guidance has never been more important. Our focus this year has been on making sure learning that emerges from our casework is translated into support that is accessible, targeted, and genuinely useful to those who need it.

We deepened our evaluation approach, introducing new ways to monitor the effectiveness of our good practice activity and to understand more clearly how it influences policies, processes and behaviours across higher education. Our aim remains to ensure that our good practice outputs reach all institutions and stakeholders who can benefit from them, and that they can draw on our insights in ways that are proportionate, practical and aligned with their local contexts.

Throughout the year we engaged actively with the issues that matter most to providers and students. Our work with SUMS Consulting illustrated the continuing need for policy focus in responding to providers in distress and potential market exit. By listening closely to a range of experiences, through workshops, events, casework discussions and direct conversations, we were able to identify emerging themes and areas of risk earlier and more clearly. This informed the development of new good practice guidance and the updating of existing material, ensuring it remains grounded in the realities of student complaints and the broader challenges facing the sector. We also continued to work closely with Welsh providers to build up a clearer understanding of their needs, ahead of the possible development of our work into Welsh further education. Developing guidance for providers about responding to reports about harassment and sexual misconduct was another priority. We drew on our casework experience and on the knowledge of experts working across the sector to consolidate and build upon existing guidance.

As the volume and complexity of cases continue to grow, our good practice and outreach work plays an essential role in supporting fairness across the sector: not just by resolving complaints, but by helping prevent them. In 2025 this work advanced in both scope and sophistication, and we will continue to build on this foundation in the year ahead.

What we planned to do	What this looked like	How we performed
<p>We said we will establish new relationships, build on emerging relationships, maintain, deepen, and strengthen existing relationships – to maintain and enhance our ability to influence.</p>	<p>Engage with political thinking and policy development on areas relevant to our work and maintain effective working relationships with officials.</p> <p>Working with the Office for Students (OfS), Medr, other regulators and Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) so information is shared as appropriate, and we are involved in relevant discussions around their workstreams.</p> <p>Attending relevant meetings and participating in discussions relevant to our work, including with the Department for Education (DfE), the Welsh Government, National Union of Students, the UK Quality Council, the Quality Assurance Agency, and the Competition and Markets Authority.</p> <p>Continuing to develop our outreach programme and the resources available on our website for providers, student representative bodies and others. We use feedback from participants and our wider engagement together with insight from our casework to inform the topics we cover and the way we deliver them. We take other opportunities to share learning from complaints, for example through contributing to sector events.</p> <p><i>(continued page 15)</i></p>	<p>We had regular meetings throughout 2025 with senior officials from England and Wales to share information about current and future plans.</p> <p>We had a focus on financial sustainability with the DfE considering our concerns for student support in market exit situations.</p> <p>We had several meetings with Medr to discuss the changing landscape in Wales. We have had key meetings with Colegau Cymru and college principals.</p> <p>We met regularly with the OfS about a variety of issues including new Conditions of Registration, freedom of speech, consumer protection, and financial sustainability.</p> <p>We have met with several PSRBs and stakeholders including HCPC, NMC, GMC and Student Loans Company.</p> <p>We have been part of the DfE's Student Mental Health Task Force and the Disabled Student Commitment partnership group.</p> <p>We have participated in a large variety of sector events throughout the year, raising awareness of good practice in complaints handling with strategic leaders, operational complaints handlers, and wider roles including marketing, estates and security and student wellbeing professionals.</p> <p><i>(continued page 15)</i></p>

What we planned to do	What this looked like	How we performed
	<p>Working with the governments and others to ensure any legislation and implementation considers the impact on individual students and closes any gaps in students accessing the Scheme. This includes work on any Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 implementation and any other White Paper or legislation brought forward.</p> <p>Engaging with providers with higher volumes of OIA complaints to explore more effective ways to identify and share learning from complaints.</p> <p>Engaging with providers with low direct engagement with us to ensure that our good practice work is benefitting these members and their students.</p> <p>Seeking out opportunities to identify good practice in providers that can inform our casework.</p>	<p>We ran 11 webinars attended by more than 1,000 delegates, and two workshops for student representative bodies. We held 25 online discussion groups for providers and student representative bodies, and five for students. We visited 18 providers and their student representative bodies (SRBs).</p> <p>We identified a selection of providers that do not regularly engage with us and opened a dialogue about how their complaints handling practice might differ from providers with higher volumes of complaints. We also engaged directly with their SRBs to benefit from their perspectives and to raise awareness about our role and resources.</p> <p>We began a project to engage more regularly with providers with higher volumes of OIA complaints, and their SRBs, to explore what the drivers for complaints are and how these may vary across the sector.</p>



What we planned to do	What this looked like	How we performed
<p>We said we will draw on developing casework themes, trends, and examples to illuminate issues that can improve students' experiences. We will focus on priority areas in which we identify greatest need for change/greatest possibility of impact.</p>	<p>Publishing information about our approach and learning from the complaints we see, for example in casework notes and case summaries. We share information from our casework with other organisations working on priority areas.</p> <p>Consulting students, student representative bodies, providers, and other relevant stakeholders about a new section of the Good Practice Framework: Handling complaints about harassment and sexual misconduct.</p>	<p>We published casework notes and case summaries of complaints about harassment and sexual misconduct in February, AI and academic misconduct in July, and non-compliance and public interest summaries about student protection in November. In our Annual Report we drew attention to complaints from disabled students.</p> <p>In November we published a consultation on a new section of the Good Practice Framework about handling reports of harassment and sexual misconduct.</p>
<p>We said we will continue to respond to gaps in student protection, pursuing opportunities to widen membership where this is in the student interest.</p>	<p>Continuing to work with the Welsh government and Medr to support the move to an integrated tertiary system by preparing the OIA and providers for the move towards our independently reviewing complaints from FE students. We work with Medr as it establishes its requirements around complaints handling, and following communication from the Welsh government, we work with providers to ensure necessary processes are in place and enhance our understanding of the tertiary sector in Wales.</p> <p>Planning for the Lifelong Learning Entitlement and other initiatives develop, we continue to try to ensure all students have access to independent redress. This will also require close working with the OfS. We continue to highlight inconsistencies in protection for students studying at members where the awarding organisation is not a member and students studying for other courses, including below level 4, which do not have access to independent redress.</p>	<p>We continued to meet with Welsh government and Medr and are working through the process for laying regulations as well as aligning with Medr's implementation timetable.</p> <p>We have engaged with DfE and OfS on plans around franchise providers.</p> <p>We have engaged with individual providers closing, including where there is an Ofqual regulated awarding body involved. We continue to have discussions with DfE and OfS about the impact of this arrangement on students, and through our Annual Report and publication of Public Interest cases, continue to highlight gaps in complaints for students studying for an award from an Ofqual Regulated awarding organisation through an OIA member.</p>

What we planned to do	What this looked like	How we performed
<p>We said we will ensure that we can offer independent and evidence-based perspectives on issues of interest to the sector, as necessary according to changing priorities as emerging issues impact upon students.</p>	<p>Bringing our distinct perspective, drawing on what we learn from reviewing complaints, to a wide range of policy areas including those in development which will have an impact on our Scheme.</p> <p>Continuing our focused work on the impact of provider closure, whether course, campus, or market exit, on individual students. This will help consideration of better outcomes for individual students where possible and will mitigate the risk of the OIA receiving complaints where there is little option of a remedy. This will encompass:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with SUMs Consulting to identify and share effective practices that will support providers in England and Wales in navigating challenging financial circumstances with a particular focus on mitigating the impact on students. • Inputting our expertise and working with the governments and others considering potential solutions for students who might have no remedy following a market exit. This includes developing thinking around our proposed options of a fund for affected students, some form of insurance scheme or a change in legislation for providers entering insolvency prioritising students. • Working with individual providers who may be considering closures to ensure they have taken on board learning and good practice and attending multi-agency meetings where requested. 	<p>We have responded to a number of sector consultations through the year including the CUC Governance Code, Medr’s consultation on the future regulatory framework and provided evidence to the Higher Education Select Committee. We have also taken part in relevant round tables and task forces including the Mental Health Taskforce.</p> <p>The outcome of our work with SUMS Consulting “Putting students first: Managing the impact of higher education provider closure” was published in July. The publication was well received, we have been asked to speak alongside SUMS at several events about our findings and recommendations. The report identified insights and lessons on both effective and ineffective practices in relation to market exit, derived from qualitative interviews and group discussions with approximately 40 expert individuals. Participants in the study included sector bodies and membership organisations, restructuring consultants, legal advisors, student representatives, former and current leaders and managers with experience of closure (that is from closing providers, receiving providers and validating partners). Colleagues from OIA and from the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) also provided helpful insights through participation in a small steering group to guide the research throughout.</p> <p>We engaged with several providers who may be at future risk of a managed exit to feed into our casework and promote good practice.</p> <p>We have engaged with OfS to be aware of providers who may be at risk of closing at speed.</p>

Priority 3:

We aimed to improve the quality of our evidence, both data and insight, to improve our organisational performance and effectiveness of influencing.

A key part of our value to students, providers and the wider public good comes from the evidence we hold: the patterns in who comes to us, the issues they raise, and what this tells us about fairness in higher education. To deliver on this, our systems, data and analytical capability must be robust, flexible and fit for a rapidly changing environment. Much of our focus this year has therefore been on strengthening the foundations of our evidence base, ensuring our data is accurate, consistent, accessible and capable of supporting deeper insight.

Two years on from implementing Microsoft Dynamics as our case-handling system, 2025 was the right moment to take stock of where we are. We reviewed how the system is working for colleagues and how well it supports our needs, both now and as we begin planning future improvements. This included examining our data structures from two perspectives: the quality of the outputs we generate, and the experience of the staff who use the system every day. Through this work we identified gaps, duplication, inconsistencies and opportunities to streamline processes. We also sought staff feedback through an internal survey which gave us a clearer understanding of where changes would add most value for case-handlers and teams.

Alongside this, we modernised our reporting infrastructure. This move has strengthened our security, improved performance, expanded reporting functionality, and future proofed our core tools. As a result, colleagues now have more reliable access to data, enabling more detailed analysis and better operational decision-making.

Our growing evidence base has continued to help us understand trends in who complains to us and the issues they raise. This year, we have begun exploring how we can bring in external contextual data to deepen this understanding further. As our analytical capability improves, we are increasingly able to identify emerging patterns earlier, provide more relevant insight, and support discussion across the organisation about what this means for the quality, timeliness and fairness of our service.

We also continued to invest in building data confidence across the organisation. Accurate, consistent data entry is now more firmly embedded within casework quality standards, and we have developed new resources to support colleagues in recording information effectively.

Across our data-focused roles, we have maintained awareness of best practice and explored new tools and technologies, including emerging

AI approaches, to ensure we remain responsive to the changing digital landscape.

Together, these improvements strengthen the reliability and flexibility of the evidence we hold. They better equip us to interrogate our data, ask more meaningful questions about emerging risks and themes, and ensure that our insights, whether used internally or shared externally, remain grounded in high-quality information.



What we planned to do	What this looked like	How we performed
<p>We said we will undertake an audit of the data we generate about student complaints to identify gaps, duplication, and potential for greater functionality.</p>	<p>Two years since the implementation of Microsoft Dynamics as our case handling system, it was a timely opportunity to review how it will continue to support us in delivering our objectives.</p> <p>Examining the operation of our system and processes through an outputs lens considering the consistency, accuracy and reliability of the data captured. We identify gaps and any aspects of our data which are unnecessary. We identify areas for improvement and develop actions to address these.</p> <p>Examining our systems and processes through a user experience lens. We identify opportunities to streamline our data capture processes to support efficient and effective case handling.</p>	<p>We completed an internal staff survey of Dynamics – how it works for individuals and teams, what doesn't work so well, and suggestions on what we could do to improve it. The feedback will help inform upcoming developments. We migrated our reporting solution from legacy SQL servers to the new cloud based Microsoft Synapse system, improving reporting options and availability across the organisation, increasing security and future proofing our core reporting facilities.</p> <p>Our Dynamics system has continued to support the analysis of trends and themes in terms of who complains to us and what they complain about. We have begun to consider how we can use other data to provide more meaningful context to our analysis.</p>
<p>We said we will continue to grow our capacity and capabilities in data analysis.</p>	<p>Integrating accurate data recording into casework quality standards.</p> <p>Developing training and resources to support all staff in entering data and in making use of reporting tools.</p> <p>Maintaining up-to-date knowledge of tools and best practice within data-focused roles, including engaging with emerging AI technology.</p>	<p>We have developed additional resources for staff to facilitate more accurate data entry and grow staff confidence about selecting the right options within our systems. Our focus on accuracy will continue in 2026 and enable us to identify patterns more quickly.</p> <p>Investigations into suitable AI technologies is underway, specifically Microsoft CoPilot. Access to unsecured commercial AI tools has been restricted to ensure our data remains secure.</p>

What we planned to do	What this looked like	How we performed
<p>We said we will undertake an audit of the data and information from external sources that we make use of to inform our work.</p>	<p>Evaluating the external information sources we use and considering whether they continue to meet our data needs. We explore whether any recent changes in the remits and methodologies of the organisations compiling the data have an ongoing impact on our use of this data.</p> <p>Identifying any areas where our information needs are not met by the data currently available to us and explore alternatives where appropriate. We consider whether there are new ways to use existing external data to contextualise the information we generate and to help with our organisational planning.</p>	<p>We are exploring additional access to existing sector datasets to better contextualise our information.</p>
<p>We said we will ensure continued compliance with information regulatory requirements.</p>	<p>Completing work to address any issues identified in the data protection compliance gap analysis.</p> <p>Engaging with any changes to practice emerging from new data protection legislation.</p> <p>Keeping under review the implementation of the Digital Markets Competition and Consumers Act 2024 and its impact on our role as an approved alternative dispute resolution body.</p>	<p>We took action to address areas for improvement identified within the gap analysis completed by an external expert. We have updated our Record of Processing Activities, and all of our Data Privacy Impact Assessments, Legitimate Impact Assessments and appropriate policy documents. Our staff have attended training sessions for about the impact of the Data Use and Access Act 2025.</p> <p>We have continued to engage with the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) about our role as an approved ADR body, achieving an outcome of “fully compliant” in our audit in November.</p>

Priority 4:

We aimed to increase the effectiveness of the organisation, to build on and strengthen our one organisation approach, ensuring we can respond to the demands of the other priorities, and create an environment in which all our people can thrive.

In 2025 we continued to embed our values in every aspect of our work, strengthening a forward-thinking and responsive learning culture that supports high performance while remaining inclusive, diverse, and focused on wellbeing. As our remit and caseload have grown, we have placed increasing emphasis on helping colleagues understand the wider organisational context we operate in and the contribution each of them makes to delivering a fair, independent and accessible scheme for students.

We focused on building a culture that is open to learning and adaptation, recognising that the environment in which we work is changing rapidly. Through clearer communication, more structured development opportunities and greater alignment across teams, we supported colleagues to feel confident, informed and connected to our strategic direction.

We continued to keep capacity under close review across the organisation, ensuring that we remain well positioned to meet the demands of our remit, both now and in the future. This has included assessing not only the size of our workforce but also the skills, roles and structures needed to respond effectively to rising case numbers, evolving student needs and the broader expectations of stakeholders.

The development of our organisational infrastructure remained a key area of focus. We made further progress in enhancing the systems, digital capabilities and internal processes that underpin our core functions, recognising that strong infrastructure is essential to sustaining quality, timeliness and accessibility as demand increases. These improvements also support greater consistency and resilience across the organisation, and help us work more efficiently while maintaining the independence and care that define our service.

Together, these developments reflect our commitment to growing as an organisation in ways that strengthen our people, our culture and the foundations that support our work. They ensure that we remain equipped to deliver on our charitable purpose and continue to make a positive difference for students and the sector in an increasingly complex landscape.

What we planned to do	What this looked like	How we performed
<p>We said we will take the next step in developing our leadership and management to position ourselves well to deliver our strategic priorities.</p>	<p>Reviewing our approach to leadership and management.</p>	<p>We have begun to build the foundation for our leadership and management competency framework, selecting the Chartered Management Institute (CMI), management standards as a base to build upon.</p>
<p>We said we will establish several benchmark measures and indicators to support the continuing development of the organisation and our focus on a whole organisational approach to maximise our impact.</p>	<p>Reviewing the way we report on our performance and efficiency and refresh our key performance indicators.</p> <p>Further developing and enhancing our approach to risk management.</p> <p>Engaging with a range of stakeholders to help our understanding of how our work is experienced.</p>	<p>We continued to support colleagues to fulfil their roles. Staff have been involved with, and routinely updated, across Priority workstreams.</p> <p>We have engaged in a wide range of conferences, events, and other forums where we explored our work with students, student representative bodies, and providers.</p> <p>We have continued to review and respond to service complaints (complaints about the OIA itself).</p> <p>We are consciously seeking feedback within all of our engagement with providers and SRBs about what they value about the OIA and what changes they would like to see.</p>
<p>We said we will work with our people to promote their on-going engagement in the organisation and ensure appropriate channels for employee voice.</p>	<p>Building on the insight from our recent employee engagement survey and our new recognition agreement with the GMB Union:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening employee voice to ensure meaningful two-way communication and engagement. • Working on developing our systems and framework for learning and development. 	<p>We have introduced a refreshed format to Leadership Briefings, run on a monthly basis and designed to share key information.</p> <p>We continued to develop our Staff Liaison Committee alongside work under the new GMB articulation agreement.</p> <p>We are working with our internal GMB representatives to build a pragmatic and collaborative working relationship within the voluntary recognition agreement.</p>

What we planned to do	What this looked like	How we performed
<p>We said we will fully implement our new governance structure, introducing arrangements that will reflect our expanded membership and maintain the confidence of stakeholders in our governance, as well as strengthening its effectiveness.</p>	<p>Recruiting trustees/directors to the vacant positions on our Board, managing this carefully to support continuing governance effectiveness and ensuring involvement of our Company members and other stakeholders.</p>	<p>Across the year, we have completed recruitment for sector-perspective and student-perspective members to complement our independent (lay) members.</p> <p>In December we held a governance effectiveness exercise.</p>
<p>We said we will continue to review our subscriptions to promote a fair balance between growth and efficiency in responding to the increasing volume of complaints.</p>	<p>Maintaining our unit cost per case at about £1,700.</p> <p>Reviewing the balance between the core and case element of subscriptions in the light of the changes to band thresholds.</p>	<p>We have maintained our unit cost below £1,700</p> <p>Our Board weighed carefully the balance between core and case elements both as a substantial future focussed item at its annual away-day and in making decisions relating to subscriptions for 2026 including holding the core rise to 1%.</p>
<p>We said we will strengthen our approach to diversity and inclusion.</p>	<p>Developing and implement plans to improve our approach.</p>	<p>We reviewed the diversity information available from our recruitment platform to gain data insight to decide where we may need to position our approach differently, resulting in the use of new recruitment tools.</p> <p>We analysed and compared our anonymous staff and board diversity data against HESA and 2021 Census data. In addition, we regularly reviewed diversity information from our recruitment platform and externally led recruitment campaigns.</p>
<p>We said we will undertake early preparations for our office move.</p>	<p>Reviewing our premises needs in the context of maximising the effectiveness and efficiency of our working practices, and we begin preparations for a planned move in 2025.</p>	<p>We agreed a 10 year lease for our new premises, moving into the new building in Spring 2025. This provides a quality workspace and long term security without increasing costs.</p>



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Operating Report 2025

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