Chartered Trading Standards Institute
ADR Competent Authority

Schedule 5

OIA Annual Activity Report for Period 1 October 2025 to 6 April 2026

(a) the number of domestic disputes the ADR entity has received;

No. enquiries received (total)	No. disputes received (domestic)	No. disputes received (Cross-border)	No. disputes received (total)	No. disputes accepted (continued to case) (domestic)	No. disputes accepted (Continued to case) (cross-border)	No. disputes accepted (total)
2809	1544	927	2471	1269	746	2015

The reporting category of 'enquiries' includes those that have no relation to cases, and those related to a case before it is submitted. Those enquiries received related to a case (dispute) once it has been submitted are not included as they are part of our casework. We are not able to break the enquiries category down into domestic and cross-border sub-categories as, by their nature, we do not collect sufficient data during such interactions to be able to do so. We have not included cases which record a cancelled status (representing cases raised in error).

As of April 2026, receipts are 29% higher than at the same point in 2025. October 2025 saw 514 new complaints — the first time we have exceeded 500 in a month (excluding groups) – and we received over 400 complaints for the second time in March 2026.

(b) the types of complaints to which the domestic disputes and cross-border disputes relate;

Types of disputes:

	Domestic	**Cross-border**	**Grand Total**
Service Issues	687	149	836
Academic Appeal	628	390	1018
Financial	160	111	271
Equality law / Human rights	13	1	14
Welfare / Non-course service issues	62	23	85
Disciplinary matters (academic)	51	51	102
Disciplinary matters (non-academic)	64	27	91
Fitness to practise	41	2	43
Other	6	5	11

On our Complaint Form we ask students to answer the following question: *"when you applied for your course, were you: Resident in the UK; or Resident outside the UK. If you are unsure, please explain your circumstances."* If students do not complete this question, we write to them asking them to do so. However, students who have withdrawn their complaint or whose complaint we have ruled not eligible, may not respond. For the purposes of this report we have included the "not specified" in the "domestic" column.

These figures do not include a small number of cases that were still in the process as of 6 April 2026 and may not have case categories recorded.

(c) a description of any systematic or significant problems that occur frequently and lead to disputes between consumers and traders of which the ADR entity has become aware due to its operations as an ADR entity;

Detailed information on the trends and common themes that we see in the complaints we review is provided in our Annual Report. The OIA Annual Report 2025 includes a specific section on trends in complaints and themes in our casework.

In 2025 most of our complaints related to either academic appeals or service issues.

We have not identified any “systemic or significant problems” that occur frequently sector wide. Where we have identified information about potential systemic issues within individual providers, we share this with the relevant sector regulators.

Our programme of outreach work continues to expand and we continue to make in person/virtual visits to providers and student representative bodies. In the reporting period, we published a casework note/case summaries on non-compliance and public interest cases (13 November 2025).

In November 2025 we published for consultation, a new draft section of the Good Practice Framework: Handling reports of harassment and sexual misconduct. The guidance was drawn from the OIA’s broad experience of handing complaints. It was put together in consultation with the Good Practice Framework Steering Group and we also consulted widely with frontline practitioners, Sexual Violence Liaison Officers, experts in investigations, complaints handlers and student advocates. We invited comments on the draft guidance from sector bodies, higher education providers, student representative bodies, students and anyone else with an interest, by February 2026. Following completion of the consultation process and outside the reporting period, we published OIA Good Practice Framework - Handling reports about harassment and sexual misconduct in September 2026. This new section of the Good Practice Framework offers guidance to providers about designing and operating fair processes that support students who report harassment and sexual misconduct, as well as students who may have engaged in those behaviours. It forms part of the wider suite of OIA good practice guidance and draws on many of the core principles and approaches outlined in other sections.

In August 2026 (outside the reporting period), we published a casework note/case summaries about free speech and student complaints.

(d) any recommendations the ADR entity may have as to how the problems referred to in paragraph (c) could be avoided or resolved in future, in order to raise traders’ standards and to facilitate the exchange of information and best practices;

We have made Recommendations in individual complaints as well as incorporating our insights into guidance we have published (see details in section (c) above). Providers have responded positively to our guidance and case summaries, for example through: engaging with students, finding ways to deliver learning opportunities that have been missed, and adjusting formal processes, as well as attempting to resolve complaints internally, and being open to settlement opportunities that we identify.

(e) the number of disputes which the ADR entity has refused to deal with, and the percentage share of the grounds set in paragraph 13 of Schedule 3 on which the ADR entity has declined to consider such disputes;

Total no. of disputes rejected	453

Reason	**No. rejected**	**Percentage of rejected**
a) the consumer has not attempted to contact the trader first	283	62%
b) the dispute was frivolous or vexatious	6	1%
c) the dispute had been previously considered by another ADR body or the court	13	3%
d) the value fell below the monetary value	0	0%
e) the consumer did not submit the disputes within the time period specified	31	7%
f) dealing with the dispute would have impaired the operation of the ADR body	8	2%
g) other (enquired too early, not yet complained to trader, trader not member, advice call etc…	112	25%

* Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

We continue to promote materials on our website (e.g. case summaries, briefing notes and guidance, FAQs for students) and through our contact with student representative bodies to help make it clear to students that they need to complain to their higher education provider in the first instance.

(f) the percentage of alternative dispute resolution procedures which were discontinued for operational reasons and, if known, the reasons for discontinuation;

	No. discontinued	**Percentage of discontinued**
Discontinued for operational reasons	0	0

Reasons for discontinuation: N/A

(g) the average time taken to resolve domestic disputes and cross-border disputes;

	Domestic	Cross-border	Total
Average time taken to resolve disputes (from receipt of complaint)	92	82	87
Average time taken to resolve disputes (from 'complete complaint file')	20	19	20

*Total rounded.

We take an adaptable and proportionate approach to our reviews, using our processes flexibly and trying to resolve cases at the earliest opportunity. Our commitment to providing a timely service and reducing the timescale to resolve disputes is an ongoing organisational priority.

(h) the rate of compliance, if known, with the outcomes the alternative dispute resolution procedures (amongst your members, or those you provide ADR for)

Percentage of provider compliance: 97%

During the reporting year we have had to use our non-compliance process with three providers. Excluding these instances:

Percentage of provider compliance: 100%

(i) This point has been removed in amendments on 1 January 2021

Please add any additional information or data you think might be useful or interesting at the bottom of this report.

We are members of the Ombudsman Association and the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education (ENOHE) and regularly share learning and reflect on issues within the ombuds and higher education sectors.

In 2025 we launched our new strategy centred on two long-term organisational objectives and four strategic priorities. Across 2026, our focus remains on improving students' experience by providing a fair, accessible, and independent process for resolving complaints, and by using the insights we gain to influence positive change within a rapidly shifting higher education landscape. Our Operating Plan 2026 sets out how we will advance each of these priorities. Our ambition is to continue strengthening our service, supporting providers in improving their own processes, and contributing to a more effective, fair, and student-centred higher education system.

In May 2026, we started a consultation on our Scheme Rules. The proposals form part of a broader move towards a more principles-led Scheme.