



office of the
independent
adjudicator

Brief for the appointment of

BOARD TRUSTEE/ DIRECTOR

oiahe.org.uk



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Why join the OIA?

Thank you for your interest in these roles at the heart of higher education. As you read this candidate brief, we hope you will get a sense of some of the positive things about being involved with the OIA.

A unique context

The OIA has a unique role as the operator of the independent student complaints scheme for England and Wales established under the Higher Education Act 2004. Our Scheme covers a wide variety of higher education providers, and the nature of complaints ranges from concerns about teaching and assessment to live issues in higher education such as industrial action, discrimination and sexual misconduct. We use learning from complaints to help improve policies and practices and the student experience.

We are independent of higher education providers and of other higher education sector organisations, whilst being a key part of the regulatory landscape. As a charity, an ombuds organisation and a body working in the tertiary/post-compulsory education sector with a forthcoming expansion of our remit in Welsh further education, we are part of three sectors and are informed by and contribute to all three.

Meaningful impact

Our work has impact on a national scale. The OIA is an intrinsically important organisation for both students' experiences of higher education and the development of the sector. People involved with the OIA have genuine reason to believe that we are making a positive difference to the lives of students in England and Wales as well as future generations of students. Engaging across the higher education sector, governments and other public bodies, we have clear visibility of how our work fits into the broader continuous improvement of higher education provision.

A positive and inclusive organisation

The OIA is a collaborative, engaged organisation with a strong sense of team. We are committed to being a place where everyone can thrive, fulfil their potential and look after their wellbeing at every level of our organisation. We welcome applications from people from a broad range of backgrounds. Diverse perspectives, views and experiences are critical to an effective, modern ombuds organisation.



An exceptional opportunity

We are specifically looking for two Trustee/Directors with a student perspective so you will be a current student/student officer or working at a senior level in a student led organisation in England or Wales. The successful candidates will have the chance to add significant breadth and depth to their professional experience. We hope you will be excited by the opportunity these roles present to make a positive difference in higher education. We are seeking exceptional individuals with a distinctive combination of strengths and personal qualities. If you think you could be what we're looking for, we would very much like to hear from you.

About the OIA

The OIA is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. The OIA currently has a budget of about £8m and around 100 employees and handles a little over 3,500 complaints a year.

The OIA is the designated operator of the student complaints scheme under the Higher Education Act 2004. The Scheme covers almost all higher education providers in England and Wales (a little under 900 providers and around 2.4m students). The OIA's remit will be extended to further education providers in Wales under the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act. The OIA is funded by compulsory [subscriptions](#) payable by providers that are members of the Scheme.

- The OIA reviews unresolved complaints from students about their higher education provider, giving students access to independent, impartial review of their complaints if they are unhappy with the outcome of their provider's internal processes. Where a complaint is upheld, the OIA makes Recommendations for the provider to put things right.

- The OIA shares learning from complaints to help improve policies and practices and the student experience across the higher education sector.
- The OIA works with others and contributes to the development of policy, both in the wider regulatory framework for higher education and in the ombuds sector.

The OIA has been approved by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute as the consumer Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) body for higher education and plays an active part in the ombuds sector through the Ombudsman Association and internationally through the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education (ENOHE).

You can read more about the OIA's work in its [Annual Reports](#) and [Operating Reports and Plans](#).

Our Charitable Purpose

Our charitable purpose is to advance education for public benefit through the independent review of student complaints in England and Wales and by using learning from complaints to help improve policies and practices.

Strategic Purpose

To improve students' experiences by resolving complaints fairly and independently and using the learning we gain to influence change.

Our Values

Our values inform everything we do. We recruit people who share our values and are committed to our vision, and we reflect our values in our work.

Our values are:

- Integrity and independence
- Quality
- Openness and accessibility
- Service ethos
- Engagement
- Equality and diversity

We have also adopted a [Commitment to Kindness](#).

The OIA Board and its work

The OIA Board

We are fortunate to have a well-established Board with engaged and committed Trustees who bring a wide range of valuable skills and expertise.

We adopted revised [Articles of Association](#) at the end of October 2024. These new arrangements changed the composition of the Board as well as introducing some wider changes to our governance arrangements.

The Board will have a balance of Trustees with a student perspective, with English sector and Welsh sector perspectives, and with lay perspectives. These appointments are for the Directors who will bring a student perspective as a current student/student officer or working at a senior level in a student led organisation in England or Wales.

You can read more on our website about [our governance](#) and the [members of our Board](#).

The work of the Board

The Board sets the overall strategic direction for the OIA and leads on our purpose and values, overseeing the planning, development and performance of the OIA Scheme.

The Board's responsibilities include preserving the independence of the Scheme, governance oversight of the performance and effectiveness of the Scheme, the appointment and performance of the Independent Adjudicator and the Chief Executive, approving the annual budget and setting subscriptions levels, ensuring that the risks facing the organisation are properly managed, and

approval of the Scheme Rules. The Board's responsibilities are set out in the Articles of Association. The Board is not involved in the review of students' complaints.

The Board is supported by four committees usually chaired by Lay members of the Board.

- The Finance Committee considers all governance-level financial matters.
- The Nominations & Governance Committee considers matters relating to the Board including appointment of Trustees and governance effectiveness.
- The People & Remuneration Committee has governance oversight of matters relating to the Independent Adjudicator and the Chief Executive and staff more widely.
- The Risk and Audit Committee provides oversight of the approach to and management of risks, the integrity of the financial statements including the external audit process, and compliance with laws and regulations, ensuring transparency and accountability.

Upcoming Board meetings

- **26 March 2026** - Board meeting (in-person) - followed by AGM
- **6-7 May 2026** - Board Away Day (in-person)
- **24 June 2026** - Board meeting (virtual)
- **24 September 2026** - Board meeting (virtual)
- **9 December 2026** - Board meeting (in-person)

Equality, diversity and inclusion

We are committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion on our Board, as an employer and through our work. The Board has an important part to play in this. In 2020 we established a Diversity Steering Group of Board members with a particular interest and expertise in diversity issues, the Senior Leadership Team and relevant Heads of Team to oversee our work in this area. We are committed to making our service as welcoming and accessible as possible for all who need to use it, and to making our processes

genuinely inclusive, taking students' individual needs into account. We have a Disability Experts Panel made up of disability practitioners and experts in disability matters to enable us to access specialist advice on disability issues. We listen to students to try to better understand their different experiences, through our casework and through discussion groups. On our website, board member Adesewa Adebisi talks about our [Diversity Steering Group and student discussion groups](#).



The work of the office

We agreed an updated [strategy](#) that came into effect in 2025. It includes our strategic priorities:

1. Casework

To fundamentally review OIA casework so that it is:

- User centred/has service users at its heart.
- As efficient as possible.
- Focused on effective resolution and remedy.

2. Stakeholder engagement

To increase the effectiveness of our influencing in support of our objectives.

3. Strengthening our evidence base (data and insights)

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

4. Organisation and cultural development

To increase the effectiveness of the organisation to:

- Build on and strengthen our one organisation approach.
- Ensure we are able to respond to the demands of the other priorities.
- Create an environment in which all our people can thrive.

Our casework

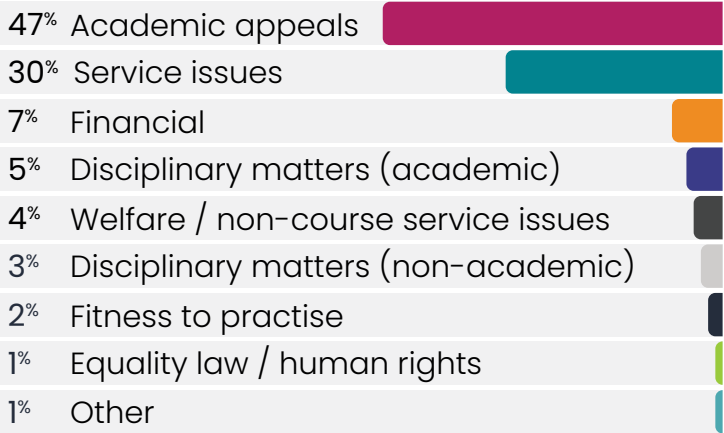
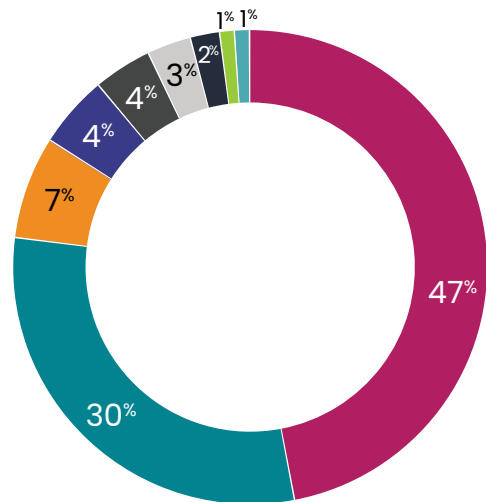
We consider complaints about a wide variety of issues, for example:

- Information in marketing material and course handbooks.
- How a course has been delivered and the facilities, equipment and technology available to students.
- Support and advice for disabled students.
- Impact of disruption to studies, for example arising from industrial action or course/campus closures.
- Disciplinary and fitness to practise processes.
- How providers have considered students' personal circumstances when making decisions about their academic progress.
- Issues with research supervision.
- Problems arising on placements.
- How providers have handled complaints about bullying and harassment by other students or staff members.

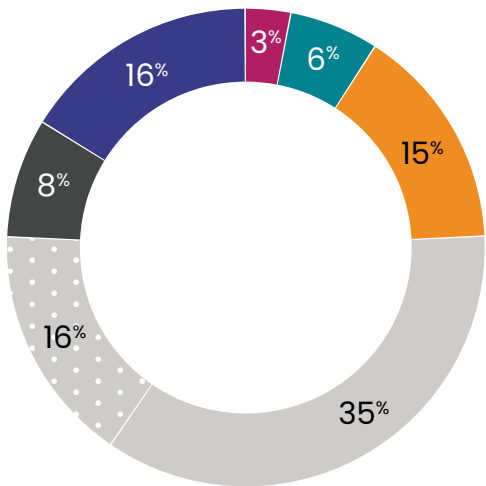
Our published [case summaries](#) illustrate the kinds of complaints we see and the approach we take.

Latest published complaints statistics (2024)

Complaint received by complaint category

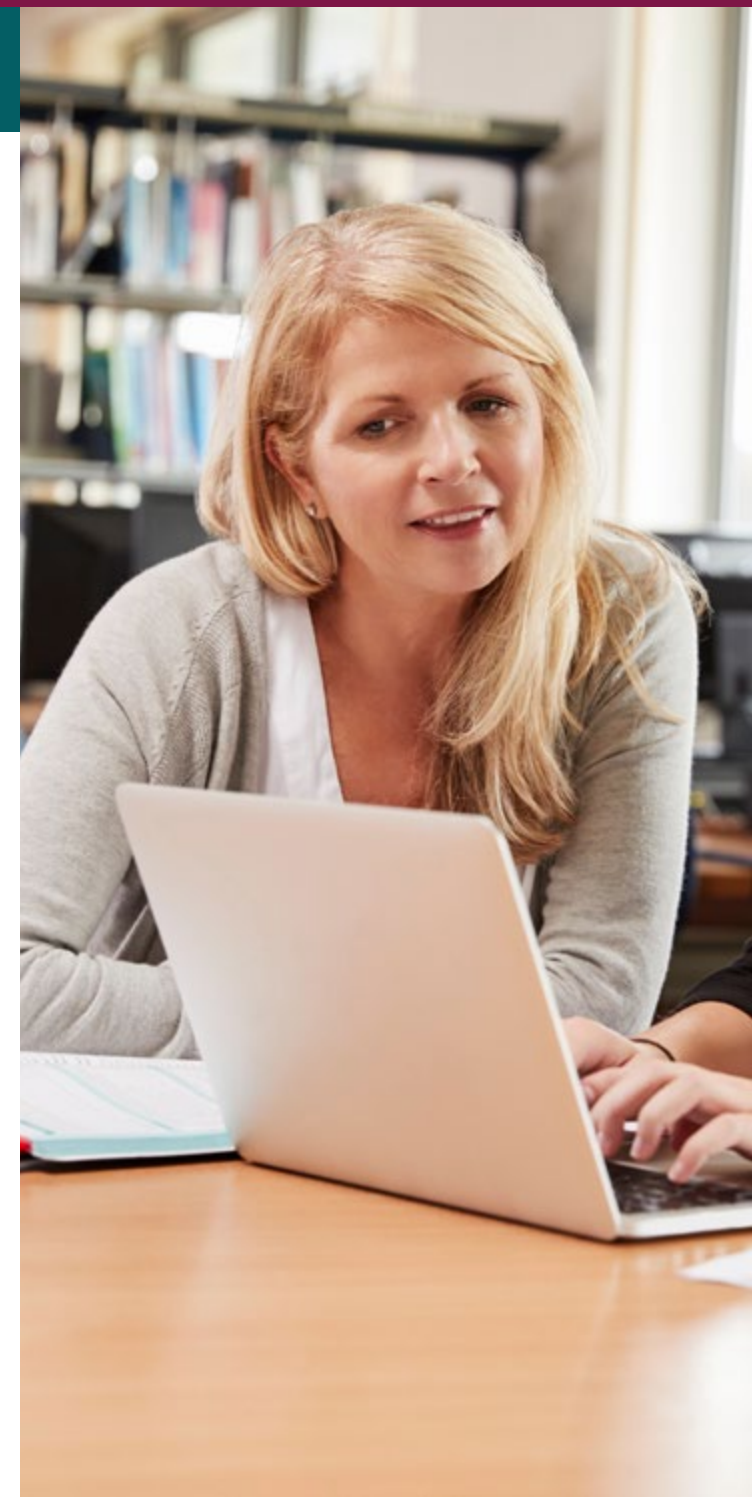
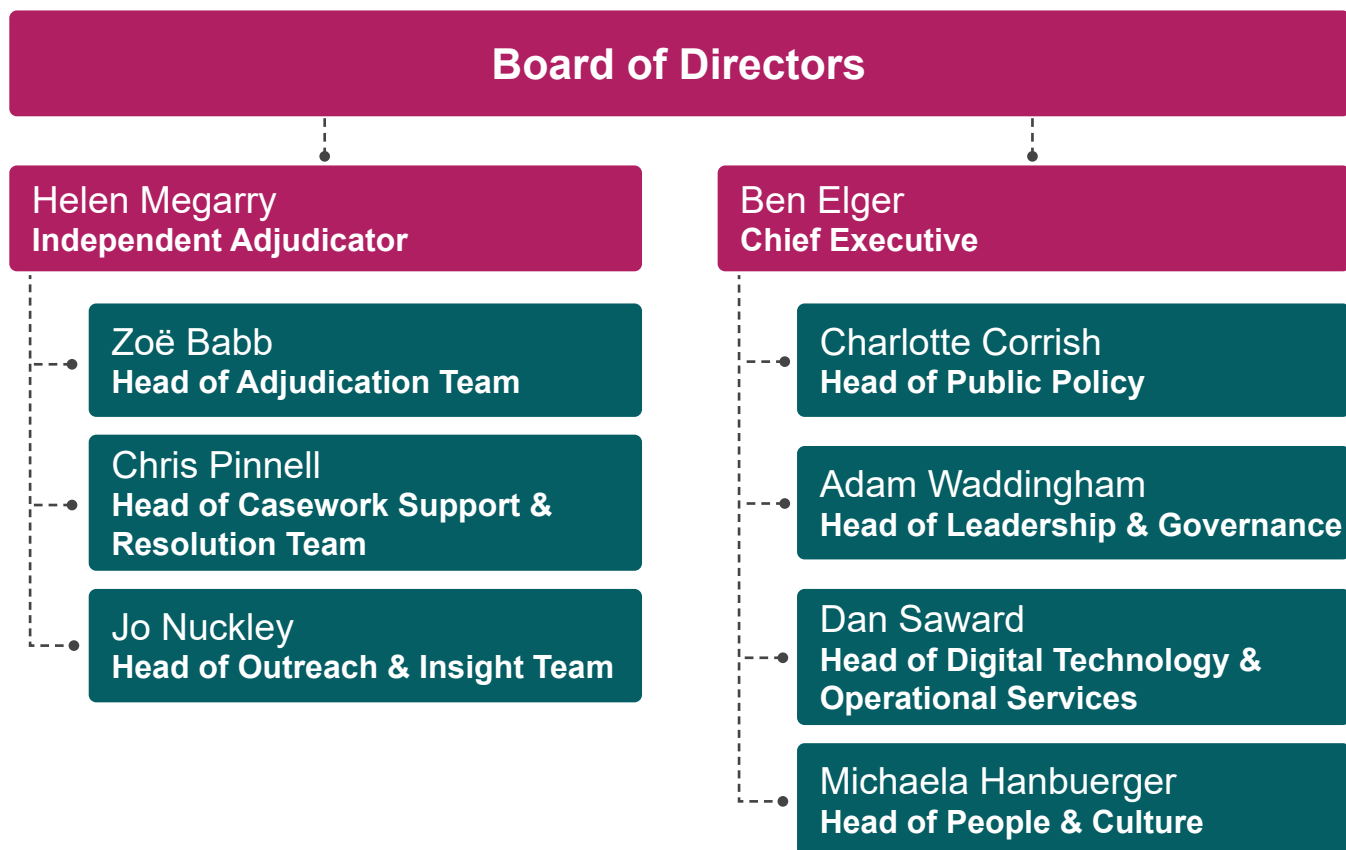


The outcome of complaints



OIA Organogram

The Independent Adjudicator and the Chief Executive constitute the Senior Leadership Team, and the Senior Leadership Team and Heads of Team constitute the Management Group



The role

The role description and person specification set out below apply to all Trustees/ Directors on our Board. We are implementing our revised governance arrangements to move to a Board fully appointed through open recruitment based on skills, experience and perspectives.

In this recruitment we are specifically looking for two Trustee/Directors who have a student perspective. Applicants should therefore be a current student/ student officer or working at a senior level in a student led organisation in England or Wales.

Our Articles enable us to remunerate up to eight Directors for individuals who are not otherwise remunerated for their time on business relating to the OIA (for example by their employer). We anticipate that a student in higher education would be remunerated for this role and will discuss this with you during the application process.

Role description

The Board sets the overall strategic direction for the OIA and leads on our vision and values. It oversees the planning, development and performance of the OIA Scheme.

The Board's responsibilities include preserving the independence of the Scheme, governance oversight of the performance and effectiveness of the Scheme, the appointment and performance of the Independent Adjudicator and the Chief Executive, approving the annual budget and setting subscriptions levels, ensuring that the risks facing the organisation are properly managed, and approving the Scheme Rules. The Board's responsibilities are set out in the Articles of Association. The Board is not involved in the review of students' complaints.



Trustees/Directors are expected to:

- Attend Board meetings (normally four each year) and an Away Day
- Serve on Board Committees, if asked.
- Be willing to share their expertise outside of Board and Committee meetings from time to time, if asked.
- Read Board and Committee papers in advance of meetings and come prepared to ask questions, to share thoughts and expertise, and to listen to others.

- Keep a strategic perspective and promote the long-term success of the organisation.
- Support decisions once they have been reached.
- Respect confidentiality.

In these roles, the appointee will also be expected to bring their student perspective to inform and support the work of the OIA.

Trustees/Directors are normally appointed for a three-year term, renewable for a further three years. To stagger Board

turnover, we may offer a first term of two-years which would then be renewable for a further three years.

Trustees/Directors can generally expect a time commitment of around six to eight days per year. This will be a mix of in person (usually two Board meetings and a Board Awayday) and on-line meetings (other Board and Committee meetings).



The person

Person specification

For these roles, it is essential that you are a current student/student officer or working at a senior level in a student led organisation.

Board Trustees/Directors will be:

- Committed to the OIA's vision that students are always treated fairly and to the work of the OIA.
- Committed to the OIA's values and the ethos of a charity.
- Committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Able and willing to contribute to and support the OIA's strategic vision.
- Able to understand complex issues, nuances and interrelationships.
- Able to understand the legal duties and responsibilities of Trustees and Directors.
- Able to understand the proper separation between governance and executive management and appropriate ways to monitor performance.
- Able to give the required time, energy, and dedication.

The above will be underpinned by the following personal qualities:

- The highest level of personal and professional integrity.
- Good independent judgment.
- Impartiality, fairness and discretion.
- Willingness to speak openly.
- Tact and diplomacy.
- Respect for others, for diversity of background and opinion and for organisational roles.
- Willingness to listen and adapt.
- Good interpersonal skills and team skills.



The Board also benefits from the wider experience of members and any underpinning knowledge or experience in any of the following areas is always valued:

- Charity/wider governance such as Directorships/other Board level work.
- Finance and audit.
- Risk.
- Legal.
- Human Resources.
- Equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Digital, data and AI.
- Communications/stakeholder engagement.
- Understanding of political environment.
- Ombuds/complaints.
- Regulatory.

The recruitment process

Application

To apply please visit [our website](#) and submit your application online.

Selection process

The selection process will be led by members of the Nominations & Governance committee supported by Ben Elger, Chief Executive; Adam Waddingham Head of Leadership Office & Governance and other members of the Board and/or the executive as appropriate. The Nominations & Governance committee members are:

- Andrew Chandler, OIA Director/Trustee and Chair of the Committee.
- Sim Scavazza, OIA Director/Trustee and Chair of the Board.
- Adesewa Adebisi, OIA Director/Trustee.

More information about the [committee members](#) can be found on the OIA website.

Expected timeline

The anticipated timetable is below (please note dates may be subject to change). We will try to offer as much flexibility as we can, but it may not be possible to

offer alternative dates for interviews. You are asked to note the timetable and to be flexible through the recruitment and selection process to meet the dates given.

Advert closing date

- Monday 13 October

Key dates

- Closing date: Monday 13 October
- Shortlist Meeting: Friday 7 November

Opportunity for shortlisted candidates to speak to Chair and CEO

- Chair afternoon of 14 or 20 November
- CEO afternoon of 18 or morning of 19 November

Panel interviews

- For candidates who are a current student/student officer: Monday 24 November
- For candidates who work within a student led organisation: Friday 28 November

Contact us

If you would like to discuss the role in more detail before applying, please contact leadershipoffice@oiahe.org.uk who will arrange for you to have a discussion with our Chief Executive or Head of Leadership Office & Governance.

Start date

We would like the appointments to commence on 1 March 2026. The successful candidates would be expected to attend an in-person induction day on 10 March 2026 and the Board meetings as outlined on [page 5](#).

What reasonable adjustments can be made if I have a disability?

We are committed to making reasonable adjustments to support disabled applicants and ensure that you are not disadvantaged in the recruitment and assessment process, and to ensuring that reasonable adjustments can be made for you in the role if your application is successful.

If you need any adjustments to the process because of a health condition or disability please contact the [recruitment team](#).



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