

# Operating Plan 2019

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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.

[Our strategy](#) identifies four key priorities through which we fulfil our purpose.

Our Operating Plan for 2019 sets out what we plan to do this year to advance each of these priorities and what we intend to have achieved by the end of the year. It includes both ongoing areas of work and new initiatives.

## **To review student complaints independently, fairly and effectively.**

We are committed to providing a trusted, accessible and responsive service for reviewing student complaints effectively and proportionately.

We will continue to develop our case-handling. We will use risk-based and proportionate quality assurance mechanisms to evaluate the quality of our processes and the decisions we reach. We will use learning from these activities to improve what we do.

We will build on the work we have done in recent years to develop how we communicate with people who use our service, using less formal and more straightforward language in our writing, and exploring different means of communication.

We want to better understand the needs and concerns of students and to use that understanding to inform what we do. We will continue to develop how we collect, analyse and learn from feedback from those who use our service. We will also gather more information through student discussion groups and analyse it to identify and better understand possible barriers to complaints.

What we plan to do	What this will look like
<p>We will 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>We meet our key performance indicators (KPIs) for the timeliness of our case-handling process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responding to 95% of enquiries within two working days</li> <li>• Making 90% of eligibility decisions (or requesting further information) within 10 days</li> <li>• Closing 75% of cases within six months of receipt.</li> </ul>
<p>We will continue to encourage case-handlers to try to settle cases whenever it is appropriate.</p>	<p>We try to settle cases where this would be an appropriate and realistic potential outcome, working towards our KPI of settling 10% of our cases.</p>
<p>We will continue to develop how we use the telephone in our communication with students and assess whether this improves the service we provide.</p>	<p>As a pilot, we offer students the opportunity to discuss their case with us by telephone to make sure we have understood their concerns before we reach our decision.</p>
<p>We will work with higher education providers to maintain a high level of compliance with our Recommendations.</p>	<p>We maintain our excellent track record of compliance, and meet our KPI of compliance with 85% of student-centred Recommendations by the target date.</p>
<p>We will launch a new system for categorising the complaints we deal with, so that we can capture and analyse information about complaint subject areas more effectively.</p>	<p>The new system is operational from the start of 2019 and we develop our analysis of the improved information during the year.</p>
<p>As the designated alternative dispute resolution (ADR) body for higher education complaints, we will continue to comply with the requirements of the ADR Directive.</p>	<p>We meet the standards expected of us as the ADR body.</p>

## To share learning from complaints with higher education providers, student representative bodies and others, to help improve policies and practices.

We will continue to develop our successful outreach programme and our good practice work and monitor its effectiveness. We want our good practice work to reach everyone who can benefit from it, in ways that are helpful to them.

What we plan to do	What this will look like
We will expand the reach of our outreach programme in ways that make effective use of our resource.	We maximise participation in our outreach programme through increasing the number of “virtual visits” to providers and group presentations. We respond to feedback to further develop our webinar programme.
We will develop how we support providers that are new to our Scheme.	We have a toolkit for providers that become members of our Scheme and we help them to understand our processes.
We will continue to develop our engagement with students and student representative bodies.	We reach out to student representative bodies through improving our network of contacts and tailoring our outreach provision. We hold discussion groups with students to better understand their concerns and to inform what we do.
In consultation with the Good Practice Framework steering group, we will draft a section on fitness to practise, consult on it and publish it.	We publish the new section after consultation by the end of the year.
We will analyse the results of the data collection pilot we have been running on the earlier stages of complaints and decide, in consultation with providers, how to take this work forward.	We evaluate the pilot project and identify next steps.
We will launch our new website, following extensive preparatory work in 2018, and will continue to develop it during the year.	We launch the new website in early 2019 and we develop it further in the light of feedback from users.

## To work effectively with others and influence policy and practice in the wider regulatory framework for higher education and in the ombuds sector.

We are recognised for the unique role we play in the regulatory framework, and for our independence and expertise. We will maintain and consolidate this, balancing our independence and our interdependence with others in the regulatory landscape. We will continue to work with Governments and key organisations in the sector and beyond. We will contribute to the work of the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment and to the continuing development of the Quality Code.

We will use our influence to help to increase focus on the student voice and experience, and to bring our expertise to the debate about live and emerging issues in the sector. We will work to extend access to our service to as many as possible of those who could benefit from it.

We will continue to be active members of the Ombudsman Association (OA) and of the European Network for Ombuds in Higher Education (ENOHE), sharing our learning and learning from other schemes.

What we plan to do	What this will look like
We will continue to work with the Welsh Government and key stakeholders in Wales towards the intended introduction of legislation to make our service available to students across the post compulsory education and training sector.	We contribute effectively to the development of this policy in Wales, promoting understanding of considerations relating to our role.
We will engage with and where appropriate contribute to the various thematic inquiries and reports expected to consider current issues in higher education.	We bring our expertise to relevant inquiries and reports and we evaluate their possible implications for our work and role in the sector.
We will further develop information-sharing arrangements with other organisations in the regulatory framework.	We have effective, proportionate and secure arrangements for exchanging relevant information with others in the regulatory framework, in particular relating to our membership, regulatory conditions relating to our work and to systemic issues.
We will work with the CMA and the OfS through the Consumer Benefit Forum.	We contribute effectively to the Consumer Benefit Forum, taking the lead on a joint public event to promote understanding of our respective roles.

We will continue to work with QAA and other partners to promote clarity about our role in apprenticeships.	We work with the QAA Apprenticeships Advisory Group to contribute to guidance and publicity relevant to complaints.
We will work with others to encourage providers and awarding bodies that are not qualifying institutions to join our Scheme.	We identify relevant providers and awarding bodies and encourage them to become voluntary members of the Scheme.
We will progress the review of our governance structure to consider how to best reflect our expanded membership in our governance.	We identify preferred options, approach and timescale.

### To continually develop our organisation so that we can do our work well.

We reflect our values in our work and encourage an engaging, supportive and high performing organisational culture that is diverse, inclusive and promotes wellbeing. We support colleagues' understanding of our organisational context and direction and the part they play in it. We will continue to keep capacity requirements across the organisation under review so that we are in a position to fulfil the different aspects of our remit effectively. We also want to make sure that we have robust organisational infrastructure that supports our core functions effectively.

<b>What we plan to do</b>	<b>What this will look like</b>
We will continue to provide tailored training and learning opportunities.	We offer opportunities for people across our organisation to continually develop their professional skill sets. This includes a programme of internally-led knowledge sharing sessions, tailored workshops such as mental health delivered by Mind, and participation in external training where appropriate.
We will further develop our knowledge management.	Our system supports consistency and enables colleagues to find the information they need more quickly through an upgraded intranet and improved case-related resources. We work towards automation of the process of extracting, redacting and storing useful casework related data.

<p>We will continue to provide a cost-effective and efficient alternative to the courts, benefiting both providers and students who use our Scheme.</p>	<p>We manage our finances to enable us to advance and balance our organisational priorities and keep the unit cost of our cases stable.</p>
<p>We will continue to refine and improve our subscriptions system.</p>	<p>HESA data on Transnational Education (TNE) student numbers is reflected in our subscriptions and income derived from the case element is nearer to the planned 10% of income.</p>
<p>We will continue to develop our IT systems so that they are stable, secure and function well.</p>	<p>We maintain a good level of stability and security through the year. We improve functionality in particular in relation to data analysis and efficiency in our case management systems.</p>