

## ADR Biennial Activity Report for Period 1 October 2017 to 30 September 2019

### 1) "Domestic" and "Cross-border" disputes received by type and totals for the period

Type	Total
Academic Status	1909
Service Issues	1076
Other	227
Financial	222
Discrimination/Human Rights	175
Academic Misconduct, Plagiarism and Cheating	164
Welfare and Accommodation	145
Disciplinary Matters (non-academic)	127
Grand Total	4045

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 However, students who have withdrawn their complaint or whose complaint we have ruled not eligible, may not respond.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.

### 2) Systematic or significant problems occurring frequently that lead to disputes between consumers and traders. Your recommendations on addressing them.

We have identified a number of common themes in the complaints we have reviewed, but we have not identified any "systemic or significant problems" occurring frequently in disputes. Further information about common themes is available in our annual reports for 2017 and 2018 (<https://www.oiahe.org.uk/resources-and-publications/annual-reports/>).

We have continued to develop and enhance the good practice guidance that we produce for the sector, and to extend our outreach activities including workshops, webinars and visits. We have introduced:

- three new sections of the Good Practice Framework (Supporting Disabled Students; Disciplinary Procedures; Fitness to Practise)
- interactive webinars that cover subjects in more depth and enable providers to discuss their practices with others
- recorded webinars available to all from our website
- student discussion groups
- briefing notes on our approach to specific complaint subjects (strike action; bullying and harassment; sexual misconduct and harassment)

### 3) Percentage of ADR procedures discontinued for operational reasons and those reasons

0%

### 4) Average time to resolve "domestic disputes" and "cross-border disputes"

	All
Average time to resolve disputes	116

**Please note** this figure shows the average time in days taken from receipt of the original complaint form from the student to the time the outcome is reached. The increase in the overall average number of days corresponds with a 15% increase in the number of complaints received in the same period compared to the previous reporting period (July 2015 - September 2017).

### 5) Percentage of compliance

100%

### 6) Co-operation with network of ADR entities

European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education (ENOHE)  
Ombudsman Association

We are members of these two groups, where we share learning and reflect on issues relevant to the Ombuds sector. However, we do not work with either group to facilitate resolution of cross-border disputes.

In October 2018, we received our first (and only to date) complaint through the European Commission Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) platform. The case was not eligible for consideration under our scheme.

## 7) Training Provided to ADR Officials

We provide regular training for ADR Officials through a bi-weekly series of 'knowledge booster' peer led sessions on various issues which arise in complaints from the sector. In this period the topics covered have included student complaints about:

- Disciplinary matters (Academic)
  - International students (x2)
  - Procedural fairness (x2)
  - Research supervision
  - Fitness to practise and professional judgments
  - Recommendations and redress
  - Accredited and Professionally Regulatory Bodies
  - Late diagnosis of disability
- and the following elements of our complaints handling process:
- Writing Complaint Outcomes
  - Plain English
  - Data protection in case-handling
  - Compliance
  - Weighting

along with more general 'boosters' on:

- Webinars (x2)
- Provider and Student representative body insights
- Workshops
- Mail merges

In addition to the 'knowledge booster' sessions, the following formal training was provided:

Title	No of ADR officials	Date
Developing a coaching culture	8	October 2017
Service ethos and how we communicate	31	October 2017
Whole Office Away Day. A one day event with sessions on: Good service; Unconscious bias; Communication.	37	January 2018
WonkHE - current issues in the higher education sector	31	February 2018
New Scheme Rules	All	March 2018
Plain English	26	March 2018
Mentoring - part 1	8	May 2018
Mentoring - part 2	8	June 2018
Mental Health First Aid	8	June 2018
Ombudsman Association Conference	3	June 2018
Plain English	15	July 2018
Professional Certificate in Ombudsman and Complaint Handling Practice	2	November 2018
Casework connect conference	All	November 2018
A one day event with invited speakers from the higher education sector. With sessions on: international students, Tier4 visas and UKVI; student complaints in the "snowflake" image; strike related complaints; student welfare/wellbeing including mental health and suicide prevention/intervention; teacher training, SCITTs and fitness to practise.		
Unconscious bias training	46	November and December 2018
Line management development training	2	December 2018
Effective call handling in challenging situations	7	December 2018
Simple language	3	January 2019
Mental health awareness	All	January and February 2019
Effective call handling in challenging situations	5	February 2019
GDPR training	43	May 2019
Ombudsman Association Conference	2	May 2019
OFS Register and Conditions	40	June 2018
Data-protection in case-handling	41	June-July 2019
Whole Office Away Day. A one day event with sessions on: Recent initiatives; Opportunities and risks.	46	July 2019

## 8) Effectiveness of ADR Procedure

We remain focused on providing an effective, timely and proportionate service. In doing so, we are continuously looking at ways to enhance the service that we offer, and have made many improvements over the last two years. For example, with the launch of our new website in early 2019 with a focus on simplifying access to information dependent upon user type and using clearer, more straight forward language. The later being a focus of improvements we have made not only in updating information leaflets and guidance for students and providers, but also in the decisions we write and in our daily correspondence. This is coupled with the developments we have made in how we share our learning from complaints, as discussed above (section 2), through our outreach activities and the Good Practice Framework.

We have also seen an expansion in membership, so that more students at more providers are now covered by the scheme. And an update to the rules of our scheme to reflect this and other changes in April 2018. We have proactively taken steps to tailor our processes to meet specific issues in the sector. For example, introducing a streamlined complaint form for complaints relating to strike action by academic staff and a dedicated webpage of information about making complaints for students at a provider that became insolvent.

More information about the effectiveness of our scheme in resolving individual complaints, and enhancing practice within the sector is available within our annual reports (<https://www.oiahe.org.uk/resources-and-publications/annual-reports/>).