

# **CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY**

## **HIGHER EDUCATION CORPORATION**

### **LEARNING AND TEACHING BOARD**

#### **REPORT OF THE DEAN OF STUDENTS**

##### **COMPLAINTS – REPORT 2014-2015**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report provides an analysis and summary of all types of formal complaints and informal complaints received by the Dean of Students and Complaints Officer between 01 August 2014 and 31 July 2015. Informal and formal complaints are evaluated separately, where appropriate.

The main findings of the report are that:

- Cardiff Metropolitan University continues to perform well regarding complaints submitted to the OIA. The data the OIA provides does not distinguish between the numbers of cases stemming from the Complaints and Student Disciplinary Procedures or the Verification, Appeal and Unfair Practice Procedures, but the total number of cases submitted to the OIA from Welsh Institutions was 163 in 2014, an increase of 25 on 2013.
- The University's records show that of the 11 cases received by the OIA in 2014 (18 in 2013), 4 related to complaints (3 in 2013), and the OIA found 1 Not Eligible, 2 Not Justified and 1 Partly Justified. The rest were cases related to academic appeals and unfair practice procedures
- The total number of complaints received by the University has decreased by 16.92% (a difference of 11 complaints) in 2014-15. This year, there have been less formal and less informal complaints recorded.
- The number of formal complaints recorded has dropped from 7 to 5, continuing a decrease since 2011, possibly reflecting improved early handling of issues in Schools and Units.
- The number of informal complaints recorded has decreased to 49 in comparison with the last academic year in which 58 were received, continuing a decrease per student head enrolled at 0.26% of the student population (0.28% last year).
- The Complaints Procedure in Cardiff Metropolitan University appears to be working efficiently and has been formally reviewed in 2014-15 to ensure that complaints are resolved quickly and efficiently and in line with the OIA's Good Practice Framework for complaints handling which was released in December 2014. Further review has been undertaken ahead of the October 2015 Consumer Rights Act, as the OIA will now also report to Trading Standards.
- A review of all Partnership complaint handling procedures has been completed in 2014/15 in conjunction with the Partnership Office following the QAA review and in order to ensure that the OIA's Good Practice Framework is adhered to.
- The incidence of complaints is fairly evenly spread across the institution and the main causes of complaints remain related to issues directly affecting academic performance and progression.
- There are no discernible trends in relation to mode of study, ethnicity, language or gender, and where it had previously been identified that disabled students had historically submitted a higher proportion of complaints, this has continued to fall this year.
- This year 100% of complaints were completed informally or at the first formal stage of the procedure, with none reaching Stage 2.

The report concludes that Cardiff Metropolitan University should:

- Continue to monitor the operation of the updated Complaints Policy and Procedure to ensure continued efficiency in the processing of complaints and compliance with OIA's Good Practice Framework and also with Trading Standards;
- Continue to offer and promote staff development relating to the Complaints Policy and Procedure investigation of complaints sessions for Schools and Units, including development of an e-learning module advising on the Complaints Policy and Procedure for all new staff in line with HE Guidance from the Consumer and Marketing Authority.
- Continue to work closely with the Student Union, to bring student complaints to a satisfactory conclusion in a timely manner.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this annual report on complaints is to present details and analysis of complaints received within Cardiff Metropolitan University during the academic year 2014-15. This analysis focuses on the complete academic year, consistent with the last eight years, so that accurate comparisons can be made between years.
- 1.2 The purpose of the analysis is to highlight any trends or significant areas of concern that need to be addressed, so that continuous improvement in Cardiff Metropolitan University's programmes, support services and management can be achieved. Comparisons with last year's reports are made where appropriate, in order to identify any possible longer term trends.
- 1.3 A complaint under the University's Complaints Policy and Procedure is defined as *'an oral or written expression of dissatisfaction or concern someone may have about policies, processes, facilities or services provided by the University or about actions or lack of actions by the University or its staff.'*

*This does **NOT** include:*

- requests for new or different services (use Bright Ideas Scheme)*
- harassment and bullying (use Harassment and Bullying Procedure)*
- academic decisions (use Verification and Appeals Procedures)*
- Student Union procedures*
- disciplinary or misconduct matters (use student disciplinary procedure)*
- financial matters (refer to Finance Department)*
- staff grievance procedures (refer to Human Resources Department)*
- Freedom of Information Act and Environmental Information Regulations (Use FOIA/environmental Regulations Procedures)'*

- 1.4 Many complaints that arise are resolved informally and quickly at source by individual members of staff and it is not reasonably practicable to ensure that all such complaints are recorded. However, there is effective recording of all informal complaints received through the on-line pro forma system and those notified to the Dean of Students and the Complaints Officer.
- 1.5 Complaints are not generally counted as formal complaints unless there is evidence that the complainant has already attempted to resolve them informally. The exception

to this rule is complaints received directly by The Vice Chancellor's Office, either in writing or verbally, which are automatically counted as formal complaints because they are dealt with by the Complaints Officer and relevant Dean of School or Head of Unit and involve making an official response.

## **2. Context**

- 2.1 Throughout the academic year 2014-15 the Cardiff Metropolitan University Complaints Policy and Procedure has been used to address all types of complaints from students, staff and the public with the on-line pro forma system continuing to be used for around 35% of complaints received which is slightly less than last year, at 43%. Though the electronic forms are not used in all cases, the majority of complaints and responses are now received and sent electronically via the Complaints Officer or the generic complaints email inbox.
- 2.2 The Complaints Policy and Procedure itself has been subject to monitoring and formal review and consultation for the academic year 2014-15 to incorporate the sector wide Good Practice Framework released in December 2014 by the OIA. This has resulted in the removal of the fourth stage of the University's Complaints Policy and Procedure, which had not been utilised in the previous five years and to ensure that the timescales for resolution over all the formal stages of the procedure met the 90 days recommended by the Framework. The new policy will be monitored closely and subject to further review if required. The Complaints Procedure is available in the Student Services section of the website. The desire of complainants to pursue complaints and academic appeals contemporaneously remains a significant consideration, but the established system of discussing such cases with Academic Registry has ensured that appropriate decisions have been made, in conjunction with the complainants. The Complaints Officer has continued to work closely with the Regulations Unit in Academic Registry to ensure greater collaboration between the complaints and appeals procedures, and to ensure any OIA cases have one central point of contact for queries.
- 2.3 Complaints form part of the quality assurance process and it remains essential that the procedure is followed rigorously and deadlines adhered to. Undertaking complaint investigations still represents a challenge for Schools in terms of workload particularly at certain times of the year, for example in August when many staff are on leave. University wide-training on the Complaints Procedure has once again been offered but with varied take up. Further face-to-face sessions are planned for 2015-16, and a short mandatory e-learning module for all staff who have not attended complaints training previously has also been developed, as from October 2015 the University will need to be able to show compliance with the Consumer Rights Act. The Act requires that all staff are trained in relation to awareness and advising students on accessing the Complaints Policy and Procedure.
- 2.4 Regular liaison has continued during the year with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), which has oversight of students' complaints in all HEIs. Key priorities for the OIA for the forthcoming year include consideration of the EU Directive on Alternative Dispute Resolution, which applies to disputes arising from consumer contracts and covers complaints by students about HE providers. The OIA has been designated as the ADR entity for HE in England and Wales, which will have a number of practical implications, some of which have already been brought into practice in July 2015. For example, the OIA are now extending the three month deadline for bringing complaints to 12 months, and will need to resolve complaints within 90 days of receiving the complete complaint file, except where the case is highly complex. There

will also be a requirement for the OIA to report data to the Trading Standards Institute which is acting as the oversight body.

- 2.5 The Dean of Students and the Complaints Officer are both members of the ARC Complaints and Appeals Practitioner group, attending updates and networking events, as well as an annual Student Complaints Conference and various AMOSSHE and ARC events in this area to ensure the University is kept updated with any changes, and can share best practice.
- 2.6 2013/14 was the first year that the OIA's revised charging model was applied to the University, where as well as a core subscription for a Band E University (currently £29,605), a case-element is charged if the number of cases received exceeds the University's point allocation (39 points). The OIA 'charges' 3 points to review to decision stage, 2 points to settle a case, and 1 point for any non-eligible or withdrawn complaints that students take to the OIA. The University's allocation allows for 13 cases to be reviewed to decision stage (39 points) by the OIA without incurring extra charges. In 2013-14 the case subscription element was £2000 in total, however in 2014-15 the case subscription element has been confirmed as £0, although this may increase in subsequent years as entirely dependent on the number of cases received by the OIA. The OIA have further confirmed every point over 39 will be charged at £220 going forward (£200 to date).
- 2.7 Regarding complaints received by the OIA in 2014 (which includes appeals, disciplinary, accommodation and unfair practice cases), statistics from the OIA's Annual Report for 2014 highlight an increase on last year, from 1,972 to 2,040. With regard to Welsh institutions, 163 cases submitted in 2014 were from Welsh institutions, and increase of 25 on the previous year. Of the 11 cases received by the OIA in 2014 (18 in 2013), 4 related to complaints (3 in 2013), and the OIA found 1 Not Eligible, 2 Not Justified and 1 Partly Justified. The rest were cases related to academic appeals and unfair practice procedures.
- 2.7 Regarding the cases closed by the OIA in 2014, as in the previous year, more OIA cases were closed than received, and 8 per cent of cases were settled without the OIA making a decision. This is a trend which the OIA expect to continue as more complaints are resolved early on in the process. The overall proportion of cases in which the OIA upheld all or part of the complaint, or identified grounds for settlement increased from 25 per cent in 2013 to 28 per cent in 2014. It is recognised that the cases that are reaching the OIA are becoming more complex and consequently more open to being interpreted differently by Universities and the OIA, which may have contributed to this increase. There is also evidence from universities that they are putting greater focus on resolving complaints and appeals internally, in response to the OIA's promotion of settlements.
- 2.8 Completion of Procedures letters are issued in all cases where a case is not upheld, if the internal procedures are completed. The publication of the Annual Letter from the OIA has been delayed this year and therefore comparisons with last year are not available.
- 2.9 This year the large majority of cases dealt with under the Complaints Procedure were successfully resolved informally, or at formal Stage 1 of the procedure, avoiding the need for students to take their complaint to the OIA.
- 2.10 The OIA has continued to try to improve the timescales for handling, through a triage system, which has involved more contact with the University and seen some

complaints handled and closed within a couple of months, and from July 2015 they aim to review all complaints within 90 days of their files being received from the provider, which should remove the delays that have been seen in previous academic years.

- 2.11 The OIA has made no recommendations for improvement to the University's Complaints Procedure in 2014-2015. They have published on their website two of our cases as Public Interest Cases, both of which were found Not Justified by the OIA, who upheld the University's final decisions.

### **3. Analysis**

#### **3.1 Number of complaints:**

- 3.1.1 The number of formal complaints received between 1<sup>st</sup> August 2014 and 31<sup>st</sup> July 2015 was 5, compared to 7 in the previous year, 13 in 2012/13 and 19 in 2011/12 over the same time period. A decline had also been noted over the three previous years up until 2011/12 when there was an increase (of 6 formal complaints), which may have been attributable to students' increasing expectations under the new fee regime, but this year levels have continued to drop.
- 3.1.2 Informal complaints received by the Complaints Officer and Dean of Students have decreased also between 1<sup>st</sup> August 2014 and 31<sup>st</sup> July 2015, with 49 being received, compared with 54 in the corresponding period last year, 58 in 2012/13 and 65 in 2011/12.
- 3.1.3 The total number of complaints received over the academic year was 54, a decrease of 16.92% on the previous academic year in which 65 were recorded.

#### **3.2 Source of complaints:**

3.2.1 The following figures indicate who formally complained in 2014-15.

• Students	1	(This represents approximately -
Public	1	0.005% of the student population)
• Parents of students	3	
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	

3.2.2 The informal complaints figures for 2014-15 are:

• Students	36	(This represents approximately
		0.19% of the student population)
• Parents of students	2	
• Members of the public	11	
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	

3.2.3 As for the last four years, the main source of complaints were students. The proportion of the total student population complaining decreased overall, for both formal and informal complaints. The number of students and parents complaining decreased in both categories on the previous year. Any

complaints raised by staff against students were investigated under the Student Disciplinary Procedure, rather than the Complaints Procedure.

3.2.4 All the complaints from parents were supported by letters or emails from students giving permission for their parents to act on their behalf, to comply with Data Protection legislation.

3.2.5 Complaints from members of the public have decreased from 4 last year in the formal category, and decreased by one on last year in the informal category where 12 were recorded in 2013-14.

### 3.3 Source of complaints (Schools/Units):

3.3.1 Formal complaints, including those of parents and the public, originated from the following Schools and/or Units, although it should be noted that the subject of the complaint may not be the School/Unit, as in 3.4 below:

• International Office	- 1
• VC's office	- 3
• Student Services	- 1
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>

3.3.2 The informal complaints figures were:

• Cardiff School of Art and Design	- 2
• Cardiff School of Education	- 4
• Cardiff School of Health Science	- 1
• Cardiff School of Management	- 4
• Cardiff School of Sport	- 7
• Academic Registry	- 4
• Collaborative Provision	- 5
• Finance	- 4
• Estates and Facilities	- 3
• Accommodation	- 7
• Library and Information Services	- 1
• Student Services	- 7
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>

3.3.3. As in previous years complaints originated from most Schools and Units. There are no identifiable trends here compared with previous years.

3.3.4 It should also be noted that as in previous years some informal complaints related to minor issues that in many cases had not been raised with the School/Unit prior to forming the basis of a complaint.

### 3.4 Subject of complaints (Schools/Units)

3.4.1 Complaints are not necessarily directed against the School/Unit they originate from. For example, a student from Cardiff School of Educations may have a complaint about his/her accommodation and not about the School.

3.4.2 Formal complaints, including those of parents, were focused on issues in the following Schools and/or Units:

• Cardiff School of Health Sciences	-	1
• Cardiff School of Management	-	2
• International Office	-	1
• Individual students	-	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>5</b>

3.4.3 Informal complaints, including those of parents, were focused on issues in the following Schools and/or Units:

• Academic Registry		-	3
• Accommodation		-	6
• Cardiff School of Art and Design		-	2
• Cardiff School of Education		-	1
• Cardiff School of Health Sciences		-	1
• Cardiff School of Management		-	3
• CMSR		-	1
• Cardiff School of Sport		-	6
• Collaborative Provision	EASB	-	1
	LSC	-	4
• Estates and Facilities		-	6
• Finance		-	6
• LIS		-	2
• Student Services		-	3
• Specific individuals		-	4
<b>Total</b>			<b>49</b>

3.4.4. The complaints are spread amongst the Schools and Units in a similar pattern to the last three years, and all Schools were the subject of informal complaints.

3.4.5. In addition to those recorded above, a number of informal complaints are received through the complaints inbox from collaborative students, but these are referred back to the partner institutions for investigation under their internal procedures, if this has not already been done. Following the QAA inspection, all partners complaints procedures have been reviewed to ensure compliance with the Good Practice Framework. Other complaints received into the inbox relate to Academic Registry Procedures, or requests for information and are therefore forwarded onto the correct department and not logged as informal complaints under the Complaints Procedure.

3.4.6 It is also important to note that once again many informal complaints across Cardiff Metropolitan University related to minor matters that had not been raised with the School or Unit prior to forming the basis of a complaint.

### 3.5 Types of complaints

3.5.1 1 The types of formal complaints can be broadly categorised as follows:

- Quality of the learning experience, relating, for example, to organisation, delivery, support, feedback etc. – 2

- Requests for reimbursement of tuition fees/bursaries/other fees – 0
- Entry/interview procedures – 0
- Against a specific individual (staff or student) - behaviour, attitude etc. – 1
- Assessment, examinations and progression/withdrawal – 2

N.B. In cases where a number of issues have been raised in one complaint, possibly in an effort to add weight to the complaint, the principle issue has been recorded to try to provide a clear picture of the key areas of complaint.

3.5.2 Learning experience related problems, including assessment, examination and progression, still remain the main source of formal complaints at around 80% (the figure was 43% last year). The OIA (2014) also reports that the largest number of complaints they receive involve academic-related matters (61%) although these include academic appeals as well as complaints. They note that they have had an increase in the proportion of complaints about service issues (contract) at HE provider's, from nine percent in 2013 to 15 per cent in 2014 which is something that the University may also experience next year with the consumer marketing landscape for HE changing.

### 3.6 Part-time/full-time students

3.6.1 Formal and informal complaints involved 42 student cases, (some of which involved groups) which continues a decrease (of 12.5% in 2014/15) seen in 2013/14 (11%) of the number of complaints made by students. Of the 42 cases, 5 were on part-time programmes, 1 on a sandwich course, and the rest were studying full-time. The part-time number represents around 11.9% of the student complaints in the University, which contradicts the upward trend previously recorded, as for the second year in a row these have now decreased, as were 14.6% in 2013-14. The part-time/full-time ratio in the University is around 21% so the number of complaints is lower in proportion. Traditionally, the number of complaints from part-time students has remained proportionately low.

### 3.7 Student Age

3.7.1 Whilst there has been an upward trend in the numbers of students complaining in the over 21 age group since 2008-2009 this decreased slightly last year, with 55% of overall complainants belonging to that age group, however this has risen to 57% in 2014/15, continuing the previous trend. 31 students who complained belonged to this age group. There were 11 student complainants from the 18-21 age group (around 20% of overall complainants, a 4% increase on last year). Amongst those over 21, the majority (21 students, 38.9% of overall complainants) fell into the 22-30 age group, with 7 students in the 31-40 age group and 3 student complainants over 40.

3.7.2 As the over 21 age group represents approximately 81% of the student population, this continues the previously identified trend that the 18-21 cohort are proportionately less likely to complain.

### 3.8 International students

- 3.8.1 8 complaints were from overseas students from outside the EU. This accounts for about 19% of student complainants, a continued decrease on the previous two years. The OIA report (2014 ) however shows an increase on the previous year for their results with 24% of the complaints they received being from non-EU students, with international students continuing to be over-represented within the OIA system. It is important to note however that the OIA's figures include academic appeals and Unfair Practice cases, as well as complaint cases.
- 3.8.2 No trend is discernible here due to the small numbers involved each years. In analysis of the overseas student complaints received by the University, 11 international student complaints were received in 2010-11, 9 in 2011-2012, 18 in 2012-2013 and 10 in 2013-2014, and 8 this year, which does not currently reflect any trend relating to the increased internationalisation that had previously been considered a possibility. Some international students also channel complaints through the International Office and reach a satisfactory conclusion at the informal stage prior to accessing Cardiff Metropolitan University's Complaints Procedure, and therefore would not be counted within the figures recorded in this report. Of the 8 complaints this year, 6 of the international students were from partner institutions.

### 3.9 Student Ethnicity

- 3.9.1 From the information available, 6 student complainants were from ethnic minority groups. Of these complainants, 1 was Asian-Bangladeshi, 4 were Asian-Indian, and 1 was Chinese. 6 other students refused info or were not known.
- 3.9.2 The proportion of complainants from ethnic minority backgrounds has decreased again this year, reflected as 14.29% of total student complaints (around 23%, 11 complaints last year, 34%, in 2012-13, and 26% in 2011-12). Whilst an upward trend had been noted up to 2012-13, the trend has apparently ceased. However this still, as in every year previously, remains lower than the ratio of ethnic minority students within the whole student population in Cardiff Metropolitan University.
- 3.9.3 As in the last two academic years, no complainants raised racial harassment or discrimination as part of the grounds for their complaint, down from 2 in 2011-2012. There were none in 2010-2011. There is no benchmarking data currently available nationally on this issue.
- 3.9.5 There is no discernible trend therefore in complaints in relation to race from comparisons with previous years.

### 3.10 Gender

- 3.10.1 31 females and 23 males made complaints, so around 57% of complainants were female and 43% male. These statistics are for overall complaints rather

than just the student complaints. It is not possible to identify a trend in the statistics over recent years as the gender balance changes from year to year.

3.10.2 Of the individual student complaints 25 were female, and 17 male, which gives the same percentage as the previous year, at 60% female (comparative with 40% in 2013-14) and 40% male (60% in 2013-14). These figures do not correspond to the gender balance of students in Cardiff Metropolitan University which is approximately 47% female, and 53% male for 2013-14, and there have been disparities in the previous years-there are no identifiable trends in this area. There is no benchmarking data available currently on this issue, as the OIA do not report on gender.

3.10.3 Of the international student complaints whilst the numbers are much smaller making it difficult to identify trends this year 5 were male and 3 female, whereas in 2013-14 a greater proportion of female international students (60%, 6 students) complained. There is no identifiable trend over the previous six years in relation to this.

### 3.11 Disability

3.11.1 Of the 42 students who complained, either formally or informally, 10 (23.8%) were registered on the student system as having a disability. Cardiff Metropolitan University has around 1043 students in total with a registered disability, which is about 5.44% of the student population. While the previous three years have shown a decrease in the number of registered students with a disability and the number of complaints raised by these students, this year there is an increase in both areas. As in previous years, the data suggests that disabled students are proportionately more likely to complain, though the numbers are very low.

3.11.2 However, only two of these complaints were linked to disability issues. (In 2013-14 one was, so the figures remain low).

3.11.3 The OIA has not published results of its monitoring forms so no benchmarking data available currently on this issue.

### 3.12 Religion/belief

3.12.1 No record is kept of complainants' religion or belief, so it is not possible to comment on this area.

### 3.13 Sexual orientation

3.13.1 Similarly, no record is kept of complainants' sexual orientation.

### 3.14 Welsh language

3.14.1 All complaints in 2014-15 were submitted in writing in English. However Welsh versions of the on-line and front-of-house pro forma are available, and a copy of the Complaints Policy and Procedure. 2 students (4.76%) who complained in English indicated that they were fluent Welsh or partly fluent Welsh speakers. As the population of students registered as fluent or not fluent Welsh speaking students in Cardiff Metropolitan University for 2014-15 is around 8.08 % this is a proportionately low number.

3.14.2 No complaints were received in Welsh this year. No trend is identifiable in this area compared with previous years, and the numbers are very small.

### 3.15 Stage reached

3.15.1 Formal complaints were completed at the following stages:

- Stage 1: 5
- Stage 2: 0
- Stage 3: 0

3.15.2 100% of complaints (54) were resolved informally or were completed at the first formal stage of the procedure in 2014-15, compared with 98.46% in 2013-14. The Complaints Policy and Procedure was revised to remove the third formal stage in 2014/15 as no complaints had reached this stage in the previous five years.

3.15.3 As in previous years, the majority of complaints get resolved early on in the process which seems to indicate that the system continues to work effectively. No further action from the complainant following action taken, remains the most common form of resolution. The Complaints Policy and Procedure, Student Disciplinary Procedure and Bullying and Harassment Procedure (where it relates to students) have all been reviewed in the 2014-15 academic year and will be further reviewed throughout 2015-16 to ensure they remain effective and efficient, and in line with the OIA's Good Practice Framework when confirmed.

### 3.16 Completion of stages within the specified time frame

3.16.1 The vast majority of complaints received by the Complaints Officer and Dean of Students were dealt with within the recommended time-frame of 30 working days. Where it was not possible to meet timescales due to availability of staff or supply of incomplete supporting evidence by complainants timescales have on occasion been extended, however in each case complainants have been kept updated throughout and reviews undertaken into the reasons for the delays.

3.16.2 Consistency has continued to improve through training and management of the flow of complaints through the Complaints Officer.

### 3.17 Culpability by Cardiff Metropolitan University

3.17.1 Many complaints are resolved by action being taken to address the complaint or advice being provided to the complainant within the relevant School or Unit, without any apportionment of blame. In a number of cases the complainant has also decided not to proceed any further once an explanation has been given. Complaints were upheld or partly upheld on 20 occasions in the 2014-15 academic year, where Cardiff Metropolitan University admitted some culpability (a decrease of 6 cases on the year before), and offered either an apology, improvements to procedures, and in rare cases, some financial recompense or reimbursement.

3.17.2 The large majority of investigations continue to indicate that there 'two sides to the story' and in a significant number of cases, faults or misunderstandings can be attributed to all parties involved. Where this has been proven, Cardiff Metropolitan University acknowledged its part in the events.

3.17.3 Feedback questionnaires by email or post regarding the Complaints Procedure have been issued at the beginning of the year to all complainants in 2014-2015 who have not previously given feedback once their complaint has been completed. While responses to date have been poor (three in total last year), the feedback received on the procedure was positive.

### 3.18 Environmental & Freedom of Information Complaints

3.18.1 These complaints are processed under another procedure (FOI Complaints Procedure) and do not form part of the analysis of complaints given above, but are noted here for completeness as they are complaints to the University.

3.18.2 There have been no complaints received relating to environmental matters in 2014-2015, consistent with the previous five years since these categories were introduced.

3.18.3 There have been three complaints received in 2014-2015 under the FOI Complaints Procedure, two under Freedom of Information (of which one was upheld and the information released and the other not upheld) and one under Data Protection Act which was not upheld. There were no complaints recorded for 2013-14 in this category.

## 4. Strengths

- The Complaints Policy Procedure remains fit for purpose, as tested by the OIA.
- The on-line system and email system works well with over 35% being received through the on-line pro-forma, and large majority of rest via email.
- Additional training is improving functionality of the procedure by providing more Investigating Officers.
- The evaluation system suggests that complaints are largely dealt with effectively and efficiently, and decreased figures this year reflect increased early resolution within schools and units without resorting to formal stages.
- Types of complaints remain fairly evenly spread.

## 5. Weaknesses

- Staff awareness of the procedure and related processes continues to be an area for development, particularly uptake of the face to face training offered.
- Staff awareness of the Online Complaints Form, and the informal complaint handling processes continues to be an area for development.

## 6. Trends

- Procedures and systems continue to improve incrementally.
- There are no discernible trends in relation to mode of study, gender, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation or religion and belief.
- There is a trend indicating the Under 21 age group is less likely to complain.
- There remains a pattern indicating that disabled students are proportionately more likely to complain, although most of the complaints are not disability related.

## 7. Recommendations

7.1 The following actions have been implemented following the 2013/14 report recommendations:

- 7.1.1. A formal review of the Complaints Policy and Procedure in 2014/15 to incorporate the OIA's Good Practice Framework
- 7.1.2 Continued to improve staff development relating to investigation of complaints, in response to queries received, by offering staff development sessions;
- 7.1.3 The Complaints Officer continues to work closely with the Student Union, to bring student complaints to a satisfactory conclusion in a timely manner.

7.2 The Board is asked to note the following proposals and recommendations for future consideration:

- 7.2.1 Undertake further review of the Complaints Policy and Procedure to ensure continued compliance with OIA requirements;
- 7.2.2 Continue to monitor the operation of the updated Complaints Policy and Procedure, including partner institutions, to ensure continued efficiency in the processing of complaints;
- 7.2.3 Continue to offer staff development relating to investigation of complaints sessions and for DLT's to encourage staff attendance in all Schools;
- 7.2.4 Continue to work closely with the Student Union, to bring student complaints to a satisfactory conclusion in a timely manner.

## 8. References

OIA (2014), Annual Report.

**Rob Cummings**  
**Dean of Students**  
**07 September 2015**