NEIL STEWART 10TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE
EFFECTIVE MARKETING IN HIGHER EDUCATION
18th October 2011

WHY DO STUDENTS COMPLAIN?

"The future is dark" G.R.Elton, **The Practice of History**

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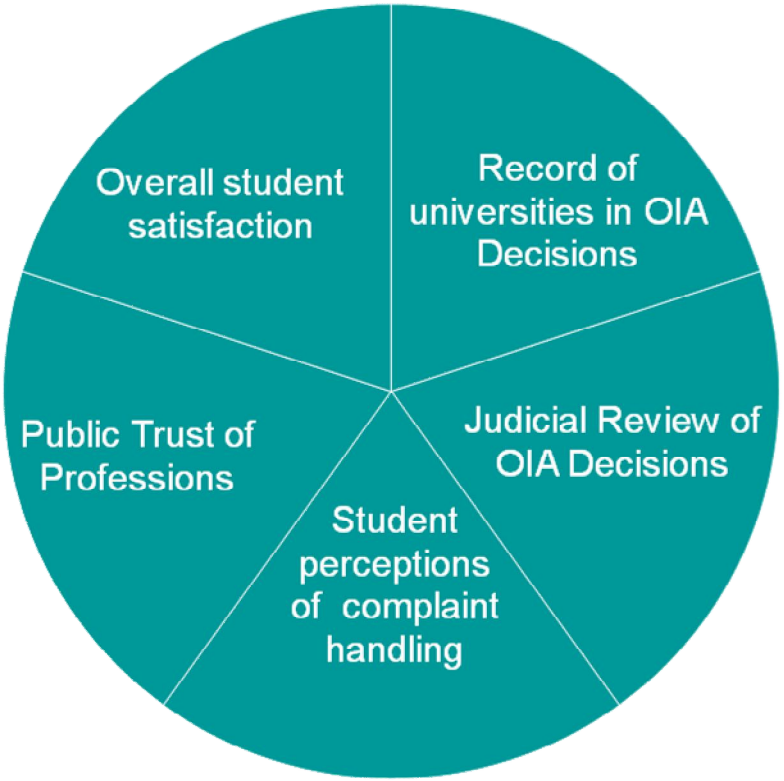
Universities and Student Complaints: The Context



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Student Satisfaction:
2010 and 2011 National Student Survey results for the UK

Questions		2010 NSS			2011 NSS		
		satisfied	**neither satisfied nor dissatisfied**	**dissatisfied**	**satisfied**	**neither satisfied nor dissatisfied**	**dissatisfied**
1-4	The teaching on my course	83%	10%	6%	84%	10%	6%
5-9	Assessment and feedback	66%	16%	17%	68%	16%	16%
22	Overall satisfaction	82%	9%	9%	83%	8%	9%

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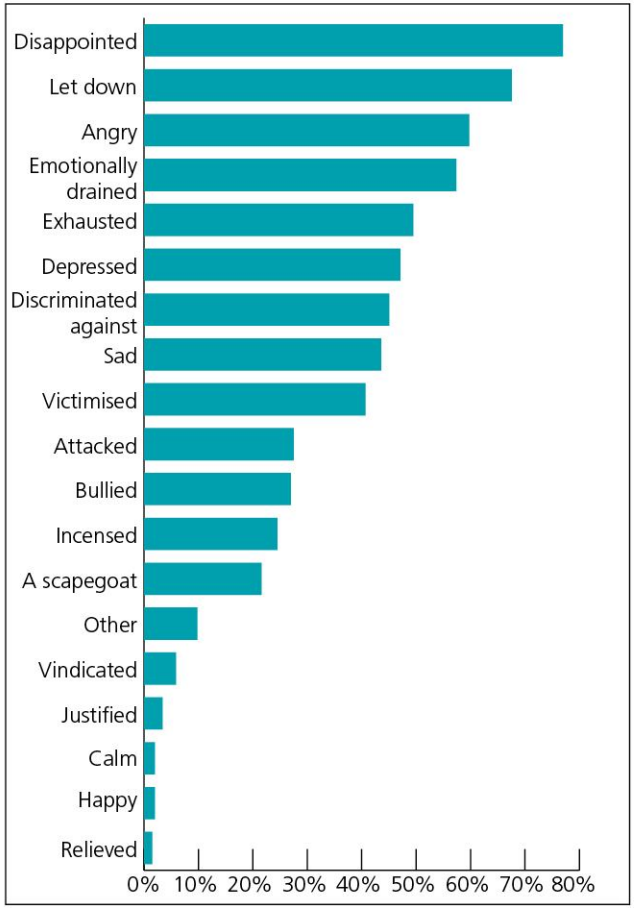
Complainant Lived Experience of University Complaints Processes

Figure 4: How did you feel at the end of the whole procedure at your university?



Source: Report of the OIA Student Survey 2009, Figure 6

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Issues brought to OIA by Complainants

- **Original Issues generating the complaint**

  Unfair procedure (46%), Marking of assignment/exam/thesis (34%), Mitigating circumstances (27%), departmental conduct (27%), Degree Classification (19%), Discrimination (19%), Course content or delivery (16%), Disability (14%), Unfair penalty imposed (13%)

  Trends in complaints

  - Overwhelming emphasis on academic-related issues
  - Fitness-to-Practice
  - Disability
  - Post-Graduate Supervision

- **Over represented Groups in Profile**
  - Post-Graduate Students
  - Students over 25
  - International Students from outside the European Union
  - Students studying Business, Subjects allied to Medicine and Nursing and law

Student Complaints: The Detail

PROCESS

- **Accessibility** of Regulations
- **Delays** In Handling
- **Failure To Keep In Touch**
- **Natural Justice Issues:**

  ✓**Proportionate sanctions for misconduct;**

  ✓**Overlap in personnel in successive stages of appeal/disciplinary processes;**

  ✓**Lack of comprehensive Regulations and departure from Regulations.**

SUBSTANTIVE

- **Failure to deliver what is offered in marketing or prospectus:**

  ✓**What Engineering students will do in years 2 and 3;**

  ✓**Promise of Accessibility to state-of-the-art Animation Technology;**

  ✓**Closure of dual-site campus site without notice or consultation**

The impact of policy development on Complaints

☑ Students as ‘Consumers’;

☑ Debate about Tuition Fees;

☑ Rise in Tuition Fees;

☑ Greater Transparency in Reporting Complaint Outcomes;

☑ Impact of KISS and Student Charters;

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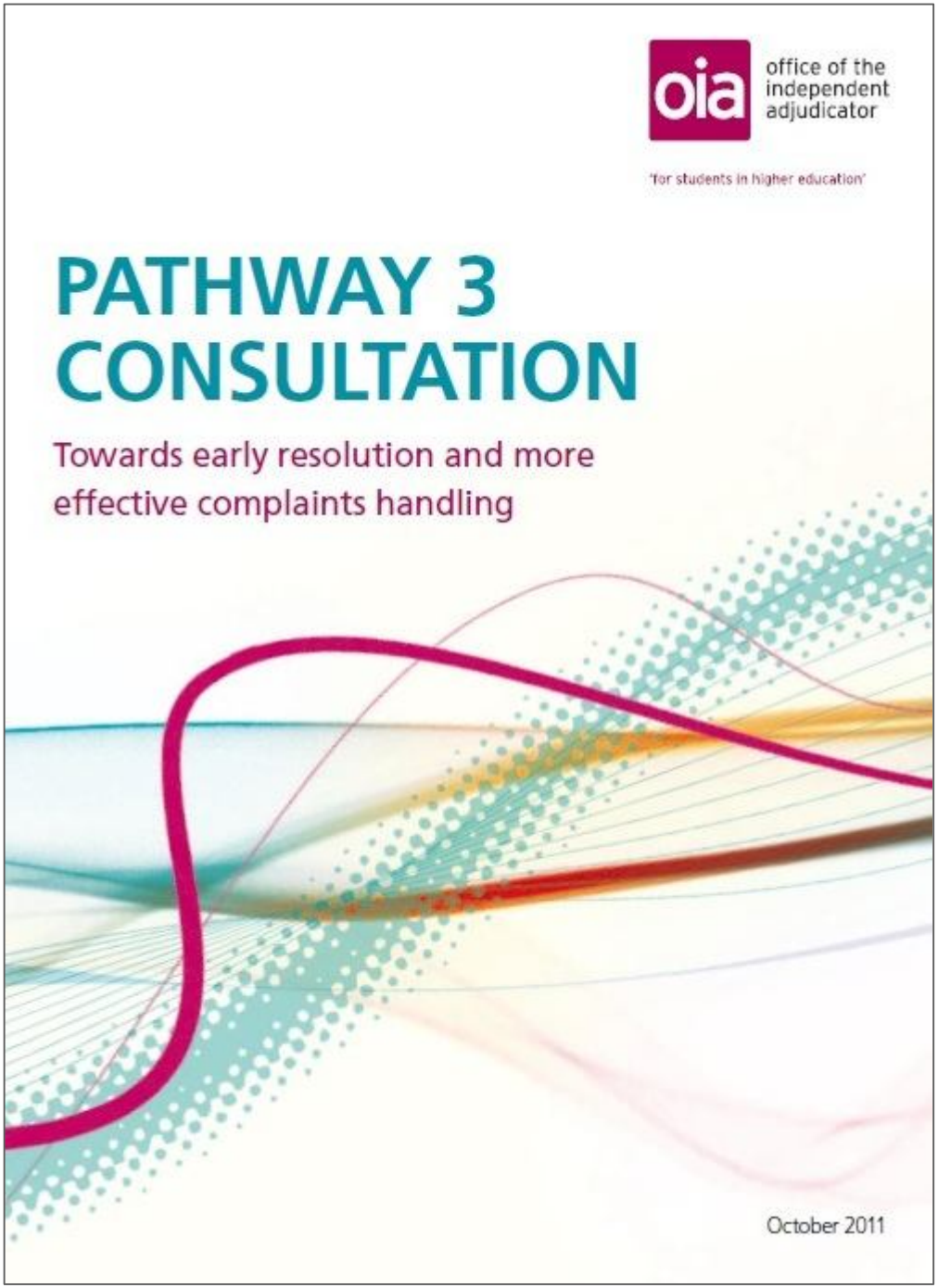
What is to be done ?
1: The OIA and the HE White Paper

- Protect OIA's Independence [Exec Summary 12]
- Incorporation of OIA into Regulatory Framework to promote proportionate regulation [3.19-20]
- Level Playing Field: All HEIs receiving public funding support must join OIA Scheme [3.23]
- Support OIA's drive for increased transparency [3.24]



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Pathway 3 Consultation – October-December 2011

- Want OIA to help HEI's resolve complaints "at the earliest possible stage2. [3.25]. So, invites OAI consultation with the sector on:
- ☑ Campus Ombudsmen
- ☑ Mediation on Campus
- ☑ OIA Standard Framework of Good Practice on Complaints and Appeals

☑ Time targets for case resolution with subsequent OIA intervention in 'exceptional' cases

☑ OIA Kitemark

☑ Case Fees as element in subscriotion

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What is to be done ?
2: Cultural Change in Complaints Resolution

- Complaints are not ‘private grief’
- The realm of complaints resolution is not a bunker
- Universities are not Balkan states but need to be joined-up corporate bodies
- An academic judgement is not ‘whatever an academic says on any issue’
- Students’ Unions are partners in educating students and managing expectations
- The antidote to haphazard handling is not an overly legal approach
- Governors have a role in monitoring practice
- Prevention is better then cure (and less expensive than Judicial Review)
- Justice Delayed is Justice Denied.

Pathway 3 Consultation Round-Table Discussions

- Cardiff – 28 October 2011.
- Newcastle-upon-Tyne – 11 November 2011.
- London – 14 November 2011
- Birmingham – 24 November 2011.