

How to Deal Effectively with Student Complaints in house

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Context

- Rising student expectations, rising complaints?
- What can in-house lawyers do to facilitate the resolution of complaints internally
- Member of A.U.L.P. (Association of University Legal Practitioners)
- 135 in-house lawyers practising at 51 universities

Canterbury Christ Church University

- 18,000 students
- Large numbers of students studying for professional vocational qualifications
- Education, health, law

Canterbury Christ Church University

- Overarching Student Appeals and Complaints Framework
- Centralist model; others exist and also work
- All Completion of Procedures letters signed by one person

CCCU Model

- Review role of the Vice-Chancellor
- Have the University's procedures been followed?
- Is the decision reasonable and reasoned?
- Does the decision potentially stand up to independent scrutiny?

Early Intervention

- Informal resolution of complaints and appeals
- Delegate downwards; allow for review upwards
- Student must know what is basis for decision and what is next stage.

Mediation

- Use of independent mediation where student perceives negative experience
- Do not use University staff as mediators
- Be flexible, e.g. venue
- Focus on outcomes
- Allows student to feel they have been heard

Stakeholders

- Support Students' Union to carry out advocacy and advice role
- Notifying and working with insurers
- Dealing with complaints from students studying at collaborative partner institutions

Staff Training and Messages

- Natural justice and perception
- Record keeping
- Keeping students in the loop particularly at the point of exit

Problem Areas

- Difficult cases
- Gap between what the University can provide under its regulations and what the student expects
- Central oversight, support and follow up

Problem Areas

- Discrimination cases; placements
- Disability discrimination; anticipatory duties and reasonable adjustments
- The OIA's role in making "findings"

Continuous Improvement

- Monitor appeals and complaints and identify trends
- Public Sector Equality Duty
- Learn from cases and experience and review practice and procedures in light of them