



**Senate**

<b>Paper Title</b>	Annual report on Complaints submitted under the Student Complaints Policy. The report also includes Fitness to Practise cases and Disciplinary cases.
<b>Outcome requested</b>	Senate is asked to <b>consider</b> the findings in this report.
<b>Points for Senate members to note and further information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The paper provides statistics and data on the number and type of complaints received during the 2012/13 academic year.</li> <li>• A new complaints policy was introduced in August 2013 following approval by Senate.</li> <li>• There was a reduction in timescales for handling complaint cases during the 2012/13.</li> <li>• The ethnic and gender data, although based on a statistically small sample does not suggest any group is over-represented in the figures or is being disadvantaged.</li> </ul>
<b>Questions for Senate to consider</b>	Is Senate satisfied that complaint, disciplinary and Fitness to Practise cases are being handled effectively?
<b>Regulatory/statutory reference points</b>	This report has been produced to enable Queen Mary to monitor and evaluate complaints. The Quality Assurance Agency provide the expectations for institutions on handling complaints and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator is the independent review scheme for student complaints for all Higher Education institutions.
<b>Strategy and risk</b>	<p>The complaints process helps manage institutional risk by identifying areas of Queen Mary provision that may need enhancement.</p> <p>The complaint process helps manage risk by resolving matters that may escalate into more serious matters and outcomes from complaints processes can enhance the student experience.</p>
<b>Reporting/consideration route for the paper</b>	
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## **2012/13 Annual report on complaints submitted under the Student Complaints Policy, Fitness to Practise and Disciplinary procedures**

### **Scope**

1. This is the annual report to the Senate on complaints submitted under the Student Complaints Policy. This report focuses on complaints submitted at institutional level during the 2012/13 academic year.
2. Also included at the end of the report are cases investigated under Fitness to Practise and Disciplinary procedures.

### **Data analysis and trends**

3. During the 2012/13 academic year 28 complaints were received at institutional level. This compares to 31 cases received in the 2011/12 year meaning the trend is broadly flat.
4. Complaints by their nature can be wide-ranging and are often difficult to categorise. During 2012/13
  - 10 complaints regarding fee issues
  - 5 complaints about academic matters including supervision
  - 4 complaints about delays in processing appeals/complaints
  - 3 complaints about residences or housing related matters
  - 2 complaints about admission
  - 1 complaint about access to buildings and room use
  - 1 complaint about withdrawal
  - 1 complaint about a visa
  - 1 complaint about a scholarship
5. 5 complaints were received about academic matters in 2012/13. Complaints about academic matters included 2 complaints by postgraduate students regarding their supervision, 1 complaint regarding marking of assessed work, 1 complaint regarding programme delivery and 1 complaint regarding the student's award.
6. The 23 complaints made regarding non-academic matters included, 10 complaints about fee issues, 4 complaints regarding a delay in providing an outcome to an appeal/complaint and 3 complaints about residences or housing related matters.
7. Complaints regarding fees were generally from students who believed they had been invoiced incorrectly, or who said they had not been incorrectly informed of possible fee increases between academic years. 5 of the cases were not upheld and 5 cases were upheld. For the cases that were upheld a small reconciliation of the fee to be paid by the student was made.
8. Complaints in regard to delays to processing appeals/complaints related to cases submitted in 2012. Timescales for dealing with appeals and complaints reduced significantly in 2012/13 due to a full team being in place. It is not expected there should be any complaints in this area in 2013/14.
9. The complaints regarding residences included a complaint regarding noise and 2 complaints regarding maintenance issues.

## Timescales

10. A new complaint policy was introduced in August 2013. The Complaint Policy states that students will be notified of the outcome of their complaint within 1 month of submitting a Stage 2 complaint. The timeframe for completing cases had previously been 4 weeks and where this is not practicable the complainant is informed to this effect.
11. The mean time taken to resolve a complaint case for 2012/13 was 36 working days; the median was 32 working days. This compares favourably to 2011/12 when the corresponding figures were a mean of 96 working days and a median of 80 working days.
12. The table below provides a breakdown of the length of time taken to resolve cases in 2012/13.

**Time taken to resolve case**

Number of cases 0-40 working days (approx. 2 months)	16
Number of cases 41-80 working days (approx. 4 months)	9
Over 81 working days	2

## Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education

13. Students who are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint are entitled to submit an application to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) – the independent student complaints scheme. Applications made to the OIA are reported separately to Senate.

## Conclusions and developments for 2012/13 and beyond

14. A new complaints policy was implemented in August 2013 following approval by Senate. The new policy adopts the recent recommendations of the Quality Assurance Agency, and the OIA's *Pathway Three* consultation on handling complaints and is designed to reflect current best practice from across the HE sector.
15. The focus of the new policy is on stream-lining the process to make it clearer to students and to help improve timescales for dealing with cases. The new policy also focuses on resolving concerns in a positive manner at an informal stage before concerns become formal complaints. The policy has been supported by guidance developed by Advice and Counselling and the Students' Union to aid students in resolving cases.
16. The Appeal and Complaint Office continue to seek to reduce the amount of time taken to resolve complaints.

## Fitness to Practise

1. There were 2 Fitness to Practise case during 2012/13. Both cases involved concerns about the students' academic progress which had been exacerbated by personal circumstances. No further information is disclosed regarding the cases in order to retain anonymity.

## Discipline

1. There were 9 disciplinary cases investigated by the Academic Secretariat under the Code of Student Discipline during the 2012/13 academic year. The cases included the following:
  - 3 incidents of antisocial behaviour in residential accommodation
  - 3 incidents of threats and abuse, including abusive messages
  - 2 allegations of harassment
  - 1 breach of the IT Regulations
2. In all cases the participants were interviewed. In 2 cases official warnings were issued. In the other cases resolution was found through engaging the parties involved.

## Equality Impact Data for Complaint Cases

3. Appendix 1 shows the breakdown of complaints received by level of study year. Appendix 2 shows the breakdown by ethnicity and gender, and by fee status.
4. Due to the small number of complaint cases it is hard to draw significant conclusions from the data. The largest number of complaints was from undergraduate students which is the largest cohort at Queen Mary. Overseas students accounted for a disproportionately large share of complaints in 2012/13, however there does not appear to be any significant or common theme to complaints from overseas students.

**Appendix 1 Complaints by level of study**

Level of study	Number of complaints 2012/13
Foundation	1
UG	11
PG taught	9
MPhil/PhD	4
Not registered students	3

**Appendix 2 Complaints received by ethnicity**

Ethnicity	Number of Complaints	% of all complaints
Asian – Chinese	1	3.5
Asian – Indian	1	3.5
Asian – Pakistani	6	22
Asian – Other	2	7
Black – Other	4	14
White	12	43
Not stated	2	7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>28</b>	

### Appendix 3 Complaints received by fee status

Status	Number of complaints	% of total complaints
Home/EU	10	38*
Overseas	15	54*
Not registered students or group	3	11*

\*figures rounded