Reviewing complaints and appeals procedures: recommendations for action

Student Expectations Conference 3rd June 2009

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High levels of satisfaction overall:

- National Student Survey – overall satisfaction:
  82% (2008), 81% (2007), 80% (2006)
- NUS Student Experience Report: 74% enjoying university

Areas of dissatisfaction:

Feedback and assessment - NUS Survey shows that 25% of students have to wait more than 5 weeks for feedback

Two main themes emerged from those not enjoying their university experience

- Quality of the teaching and the lack of support from tutors
- Concerns about the cost of university and the level of debt

NUS Student Experience Report

Survey of School leavers:

- University will be like school, only harder

  Agree 27% Disagree 54%

- Most of the time at university, there will be a lecturer or tutor available that I can go to for advice or information

  Agree 74% Disagree 13%

- I will see an academic tutor, lecturer etc., regularly and really get to know them

  Agree: 59% Disagree: 12%

NUS Student Experience Report

Survey of School leavers:

- I will do most of my learning at university in large lectures

  Agree 28% Disagree 52%

- Like school, university work will involve remembering what is taught by teachers

  Agree 34% Disagree 39%

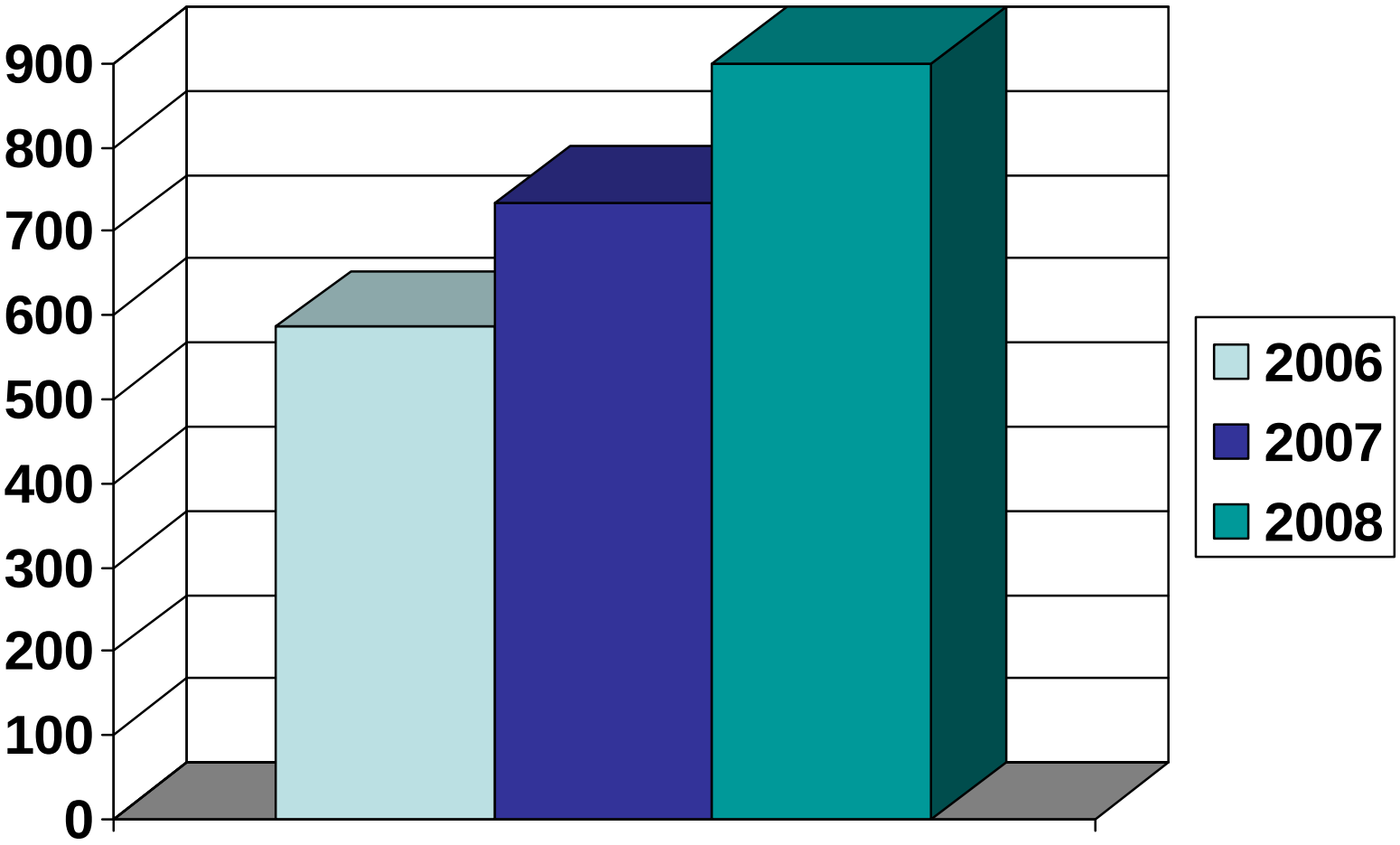
- Doing well at university will require learning to think differently

  Agree: 76% Disagree: 10%

Dearing Report thought it was likely that complaints would increase “particularly as assessment criteria become more explicit and student expectations and financial commitments increase.”

OIA Annual Report

Number of complaints received per year

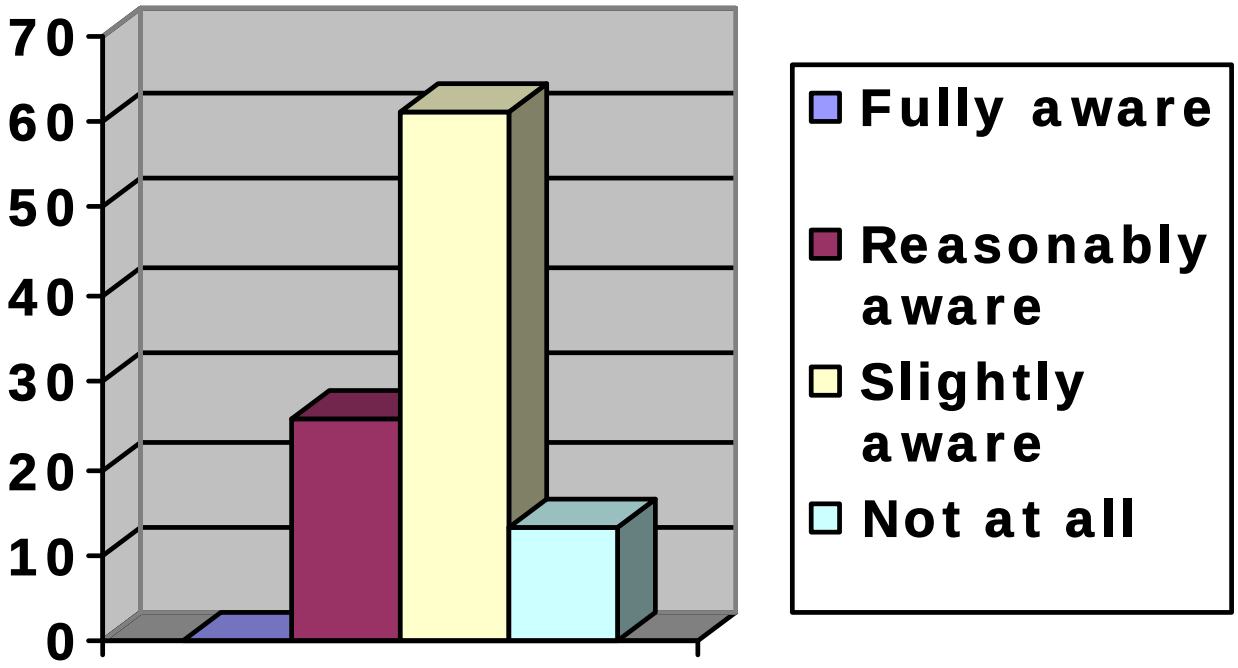


NUS Complaints research

- Workshops at four NUS summer training events – July/August
  - Student officers from 45 institutions
- Survey of advisers within students' unions – July-September
  - Respondents from 23 students' unions in England and Wales
- Focus group of students' unions at NUS HE Conference – January
  - Dozen representatives from students' unions
- Critical friends within the HE sector

Awareness of procedures

How aware would you say students are of the complaints and appeals procedures at your institution?



Awareness of procedures

- A number of universities email their students at exam time about their procedures
- Institutions should consider the language that the procedures are written in
- A third of institutions do not provide additional relevant information at the time a complaint or appeal is made
- Should consider establishing a model procedure

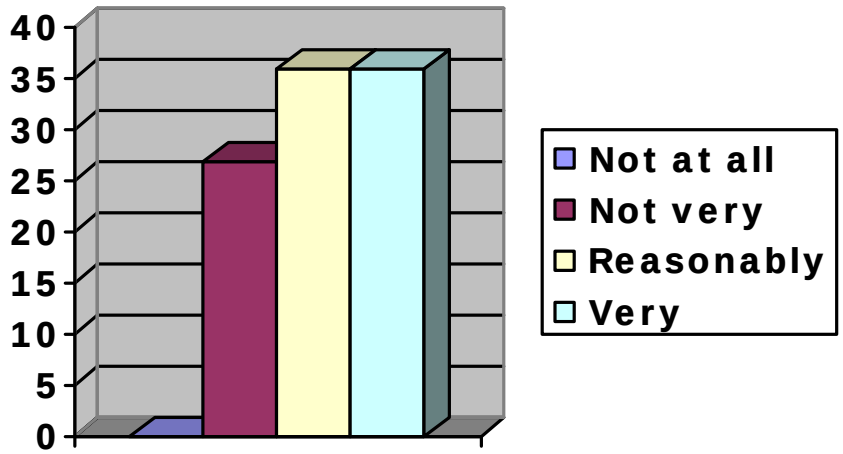
Informal procedures

- 60% say that informal processes resolve the issue “sometimes” or “often”
- Clear timeframe for informal processes
- Monitoring informal processes for trends
- Role of mediation
- Having one person within the institution responsible for complaints and advising students – possibly a campus ombudsman

Formal procedures

All student advisers aware of students being afraid of making a complaint or appeal due to how it may affect their relationship with staff

How widespread do you think this is?



Institutions should make explicit that they will respond quickly to any cases where there is a break-down in relationship between the student and the person they are complaining about.

Formal procedures

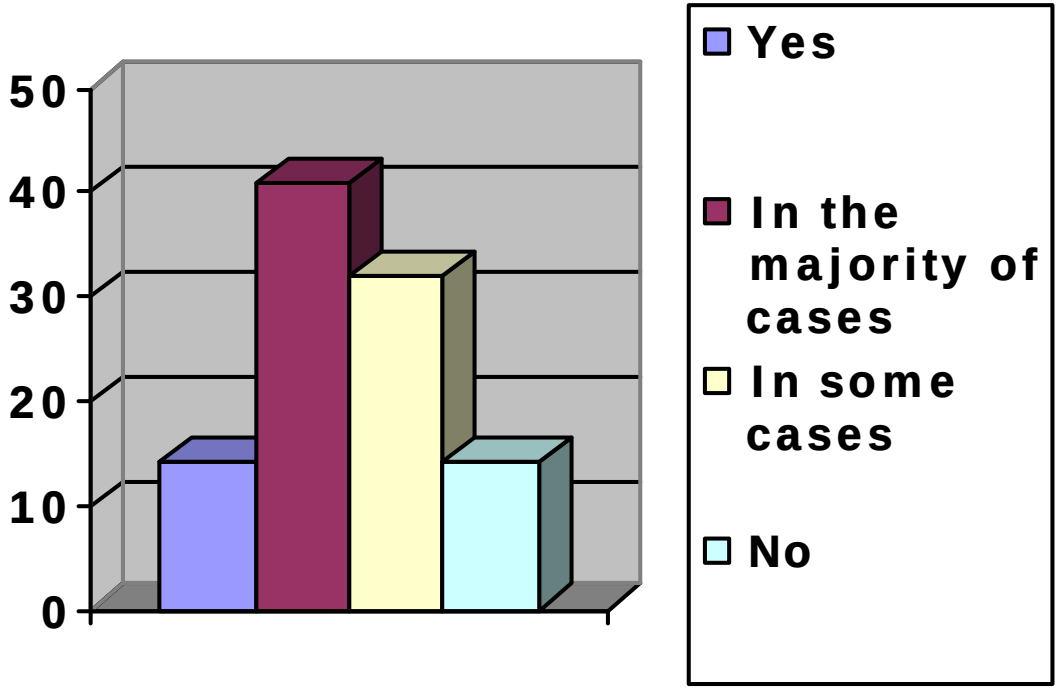
- Longest length of time a case taking - all the responses were over six months, half of the respondents saying that it was over a year, and a couple of cases was over two years.
- Students should be allowed to present their case in person if they want
- Role of the students' union in supporting a student they believe to be vexatious

Feeding back to students' unions

- 80% of cases the students' union is not officially informed by the institution about the outcome of the case, even where they have supported the student through the process
- Reviewing procedures at least every three years and after major cases
- Involving students/ students' union in reviewing the procedures

Perceptions

Do you consider your institutional complaints procedure to be transparent, fair and just?



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