MEETING STUDENT EXPECTATIONS
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‘Managing Complaints and Appeals – an institutional perspective’

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KEY ISSUES

- Students as consumers or even customers. The student-HEI relationship has moved away from the traditional ‘scholarly partnership’ towards a more contractual relationship (Fulton Phillips, Perspectives, 2004)
- There are increasing financial and employment pressures on students. Students demand more value for money. Recent UNITE surveys show that students’ main motivation for studying in HE is to obtain a qualification for a career

KEY ISSUES (2)

- There is intense competition for students especially students from overseas. Institutions must be careful not to ‘over-promise’
- Levels of accountability have increased. Students themselves expect high levels of service. External review of complaints and appeals now a routine feature.

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

- Pre-entry information a critical factor
- The importance of induction
- Accessible and timely information
- Recognising the requirements of specific groups: disabled, international, mature, etc
- Articulation of rights and responsibilities: HE is different from most other services – “it requires quality input from the consumer to succeed” (Buckton)

THE IMPORTANCE OF FEEDBACK

- Review feedback mechanisms
- Analyse responsiveness to issues raised
- Actively manage the relationship with the student body
- Regard complaints as another form of feedback

TRANSPARENT PROCEDURES

- Procedures should comply with principles of natural justice and fairness – the right to a hearing, the right to be represented, etc
- They should always seek to resolve matters at an early, informal stage
- They should be widely published and reference made to them at induction, and at other key points (e.g. around examinations and results)

TRANSPARENT PROCEDURES (2)

- They should be supplemented by less formal guidance (FAQs etc) but this should not be a substitute for plain English
- They should include timescales and information on what will happen if timescales cannot be met
- They should allocate responsibility for the management/investigation of complaints to specific individuals
- They should include arrangements for monitoring and reporting

COMMON PROBLEMS

- Defensiveness
- Multiple claims: an appeal followed by a complaint about how the appeal was handled
- Academic judgement
- Unrealistic expectations/aspirations
- Legal representation
- Complaints from third parties
- Managing complaints outwith the procedures
- Apologies and remedies

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- 8000 students
- Higher than normal number of mature students: 50.30% of all full-time students were >21 at point of entry. 37.99% of entrants to HEFCE funded courses were >21 on entry (in 2007/2008)
- 11.18% of students on full-time HEFCE funded undergraduate courses in 2007/08 were disabled (8.36% for all students on all modes of study).

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- A large Institute of Health and Society and of Education, and a very broad mix of subjects
- But relatively low number of appeals or complaints that go beyond Stage 1 of the Procedures (2007-08: 15 academic appeals with 4 upheld; only 1 complaint went past Stage 1 of the procedures)
- Only 4 cases that have been referred to the OIA – all not justified. All Subjects Allied to Medicine or similar professional course
- WHY?