



University of  
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# MANAGING RISING COMPLAINTS:

The Concept, Implementation and  
Sustainability

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# Huddersfield, England



Inspiring tomorrow's professionals

- The Vice-Chancellorate is supported by 8 central services
- 7 Schools: Art, Design & Architecture, Business, Computing & Engineering, Education & Professional Development, Human & Health Sciences, Applied Sciences & Music, Humanities & Media.
- Approx 23,000 students following undergrad, postgrad taught and research on campus and a small number of overseas courses
- Management: QAA perspective devolved responsibility with central steer
- Encouraged to be innovative

- Registry staffing is 16fte responsible for:  
Appeals, complaints, disciplinarys, academic misconduct, fitness to practice  
All reviews, quality assurance and enhancement, taught & PGR  
Regulatory issues and compliance  
The annual Student VOICE conference  
Examinations and graduations  
Servicing of Senate, University Teaching & Learning Committee,  
Quality & Standards Advisory Group, Extenuating Circumstances,  
Graduate Board, University Research Ethics and Integrity Committee  
and other ad hoc projects

# RISING COMPLAINTS: Thinking about Mediation 2010/11

- Complaints had doubled in one year!
- British justice system promoting mediation
- Mediators need to be accredited
- Training cost £4,500, intensive 1 week external course
- 3 months later –  
Finally, accredited with planned CPD – **READY TO ROLL**

# Catalyst for Further Change: Email from a student

'didn't go in at all till last friday.

i was just miserable, thought i had already screwed it all up and any career prospects with it. i just went mad for a while, didn't want to do anything. eat, sleep, go out. nothing was going my way i just felt like i didn't know what to do and i'd just had enough. i didn't really know what i was doing.

thought I had already screwed it all up and I dunno was just planning to wing it for a while then top myself once everyone realises what's happening. then I realised I needed to sort it out'

# How this affected mediation plans



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- How could this be mediated
- A member of academic staff who could demonstrate 'empathy' and guide the student through a rocky patch
  - \*\*A Student Conciliator\*\*
- Agreed with PVC Student Conciliators more effective at resolving issues at a lower level before they become a complaint
- Also to centralise Extenuating Circumstances

# IMPLEMENTATION: Developing the Student Conciliator Role

- Developed a role spec for the SC
- External training
- Registry input into the training
  - training over 2 days £3,500 for up to 15 on site
- Developed an agreement/discussion document
- Regular meetings included the PVC (T&L)



# EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES (ECS)

- Centralised ECs
- Reviewed the EC guidance documents
- Mapped against criteria
- Students receiving consistent and timely advice

# The first year

- Schools had 1 Student Conciliator – Registry had 3 and 1 mediator
- First year complaints halved BUT itchy feet within the group
- Revisited the SC project

# THE OIA PILOTS INITIATIVE

- As part of the OIA pilot revamped the training to make it in-house training
- Centralised the EC Procedure
- Results surgeries were offered for the appeals period
- Developed 'BSHoR' the regulatory app (live 2013/14)
- Complaints down by two thirds!!!

# Conciliation v Mediation

- Acknowledge formal complaints although reduced are becoming more complex
- It's good to talk' BT; conciliation is less formal
- Few go to mediation
- Appeals some success with conciliation

# SUSTAINABILITY: What else can we do?



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- Continue to educate staff and students via the VLE/SU
- Promote B'SHoR
- Continue selectivity as part of the Student Conciliator recruitment and training process
- Promote the Student Conciliator procedure to Partner Institutions using the DALO

# How have we got this far?

- Total commitment from the PVC Teaching & Learning
- Support from staff in the Students' Union Advice Centre and Sabbatical Officers
- Demonstrate we are improving the student experience **and** the staff experience
- The OIA Pilots Initiative – the SC video, catch it here
- <http://youtu.be/7UTrPEWCZTc>

# How has the University benefitted?

- Increased levels of student satisfaction
- Feedback from the SU Advice Centre: students like the SC process
- Significantly reduced complaints, the remainder more complex or vexatious
- Happier staff not getting drawn into protracted complaints
- Times Higher Leadership & Management Award