



The Open
University

Equality and Diversity Annual Report 2017

Monitoring data

Student Complaints

Published:

Comments or queries about this report are welcomed and should be sent for the attention of the Head of Equality and Diversity.

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About Student Complaints

The University's complaints and appeals procedures were revised in 2015 to align with the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) Code of Practice and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's Good Practice Framework. The revised complaints and administrative appeals procedures were approved by the Senate of the University in August 2015 and the academic appeals in October 2015.

A complaint is defined as "an oral or written expression of dissatisfaction concerning the provision of a programme of study or related academic or administrative service, which is not an appeal against a decision".

An administrative appeal is defined as "a request for a review of a decision taken by an individual or body charged with making decisions about any aspect of a student's access to learning or learning experience with the University which is not an academic decision".

An academic appeal is defined as "a request for a review of a decision of an academic body charged with making decisions on admission, assessment, student progression and awards".

There are three stages to either a complaint or an appeal, known as informal, formal and review. If a student considers that not all reasonable steps have been taken at the informal stage to resolve the matter, or that the decision they are appealing has not been reviewed in accordance with the relevant policies, procedures or regulations, they can request that their complaint or appeal be escalated to the formal stage and then to the review stage. Therefore the same complaint/appeal from the same student may be counted 3 times in statistical data if their complaint or appeal has been considered at all 3 stages of the procedure.

Having exhausted the University's internal complaints and appeals procedures the student will be issued with a Completion of Procedures letter which advises them of their right to request the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) to review their complaint. Within this report these OIA cases are recorded as external complaints and appeals. This category also includes any applications made to the Courts by students.

Data is collected via The Open University's customer relationship management system (VOICE), from which monthly and annual reports are produced. The reports include data on age, gender, ethnicity, as well as data on students who have declared a disability or any additional requirements to the University.

All students, once they have made a complaint or appeal to the University, are included in the reporting procedures including undergraduate, postgraduate and research students.

Notes on the data

The reporting period for equality and diversity data is 1 August 2016 to 31 July 2017 in order to enable comparison with the data produced in respect of equality and diversity on the total student population. Trend data is provided in charts for ease of reference. The data is provided over a six year period for all complaints and appeals at the concern, formal, review and external stages for ethnicity, disability, gender and age.

The comparison data within the report varies by category because the data available from the Information Office is not complete for all areas. The figures for students by age and by gender include all UK students and non-UK students studying undergraduate and postgraduate modules. The figures also include overseas students, Research students and, in previous years, ITE students.

The University does not hold robust disability statistics for overseas students, therefore this group has been left out of the calculations for students with disabilities. The University also does not have robust ethnicity data on overseas students, and as non-UK students have their own particular data (by domicile and geographic region), both these groups are left out of the ethnicity calculations for the participation headcount for 2016/17.

The data for this report was extracted on 14 February 2018 with the participation headcount data provided by the Information Office on 13 February 2018.

Complaints and Appeals

The total number of complaints and appeals received from students in the period 1 August 2016 to 31 July 2017 is 3489 (excluding external complaints and appeals). This represents an increase of 44.6% compared to the previous reporting period.

Complaints

The total number of complaints received from students in the period 1 August 2016 to 31 July 2017 is 2230 (excluding external complaints). This is an increase of 64.5%. This increase can be explained by the manner in which front line staff are now recording contact from dissatisfied students, rather than students having to submit a complaint in writing to the Student Casework Office (SCO). It is therefore a matter of judgement whether the staff member believes the Student Complaints and Appeals Procedures should be implemented.

Appeals

The total number of appeals received from students in the period 1 August 2016 to 31 July 2017 is 1259 (including TMA Appeals but excluding external appeals). This is an increase of 19.1% since 2015/16.

Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education

The total number of cases reviewed by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) in the period 1 August 2016 to 31 July 2017 is 57 which is an increase of 18.8% on the previous reporting period.

Equality related complaints/appeals

Table 1 below shows the number of equality related complaints and appeals received at stage 3 of the complaints and appeals procedures, and whether these were upheld following investigation by the University.

Table 2 shows the number of equality related cases investigated by the OIA in the period 1 August 2016 to 31 July 2017 and whether these were upheld or not. It should be noted that a post hoc judgment has been made in each final stage case as to whether the issue complained of is of an equality related nature. The Student Casework Office is unable to record whether a complaint/appeal is equality related or contains an element of alleged discrimination until it is proven.

Table 1: Equality related nature and outcomes of complaints and appeals received at stage 3 in 2016/17

Nature (equality related)	No. stage 3 cases	Outcomes			Resulting action taken		
		No. Upheld	No. Dismissed	No. settled	Change for individual (e.g. compensation/fee waiver/special arrangement)	Change for all students (i.e. policy/procedure change)	No change
Age	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disability:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
-- course materials	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
-- examinations and assessment	18	3	15	0	3	0	15
- Disabled Students' Allowance problems	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
-- other	6	0	1	5	2	0	4
Ethnicity/Race	3	0	0	3	0	0	3
Gender	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
Religion/belief	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sexual orientation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 2: Equality related nature and outcomes of complaints and appeals received at stage 3+ in 2016/17

Nature (equality related)	No. stage 3+ cases	Outcomes			Other (settled , not proceeded with)	Resulting action taken		
		No. Upheld	No. Dismissed	No. outstanding outcomes		Change for individual (e.g. compensation/ fee waiver/special arrangement)	Change for all students (i.e. policy/procedure change)	No change
Age	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disability:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
-- course materials	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
-- examinations and assessment	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
- Disabled Students' Allowance problems	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
-- other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ethnicity/ Race	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gender	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Religion/ belief	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sexual orientation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Student Complaints

Age

Complaints and Appeals

The table below provides a breakdown of the total number of complaints and appeals received by the Open University in 2016/17 from students by age. This is then compared to the overall University student population.

Table 3: Complaints and appeals cases, by age, 2016-17

Age	25 and Under	26 - 35	36 - 45	46 - 55	56+	Known Total	Unknown	Grand Total
Complaints Stage 1/Concern	211	527	474	397	236	1845	8	1853
complaints Stage 2/Formal	25	89	78	73	32	297	1	298
Complaints Stage 3/Review	7	9	15	34	14	79	0	79
Complaints Total	243	625	567	504	282	2221	9	2230
Admin Appeal Stage 1 /Query	38	102	106	68	27	341	2	343
Academic Appeal stage1/Query	36	90	71	56	22	275	0	275
Appeal Admin stage 2 /Formal	6	22	15	12	4	59	0	59
Appeal Academic stage 2 /Formal	13	49	34	39	11	146	1	147
Appeal Academic stage 3 /Review	6	40	38	23	10	117	0	117
Appeal Admin stage 3/Review	2	4	3	3	0	12	0	12
TMA Appeal	29	99	101	51	26	306	0	306
Appeals Total	130	406	368	252	100	1256	3	1259
Total Complaints & Appeals	373	1031	935	756	382	3477	12	3489
OIA cases	8	10	17	14	8	57	0	57
Grand Total	381	1041	952	770	390	3534	12	3546
Participation headcount all UK students studying UG + PG courses including all Research and ITE students 2012/13.	29262	46940	29915	18049	9757	1333928	0	1333928
Participation % all UK students studying UG + PG courses including all Research students and ITE students 2012/13	21.85%	35.05%	22.34%	13.48%	7.29%	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Complaints and Appeals %	10.69%	29.55%	26.80%	21.67%	10.95%	99.66%	0.34%	100.00%
Complaints%	10.90%	28.03%	25.43%	22.60%	12.65%	99.60%	0.40%	100.0%
Appeals%	10.33%	32.25%	29.23%	20.02%	7.94%	99.75%	0.34%	100.0%
OIA Cases %	14.04%	17.54%	29.82%	24.56%	14.04%	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%

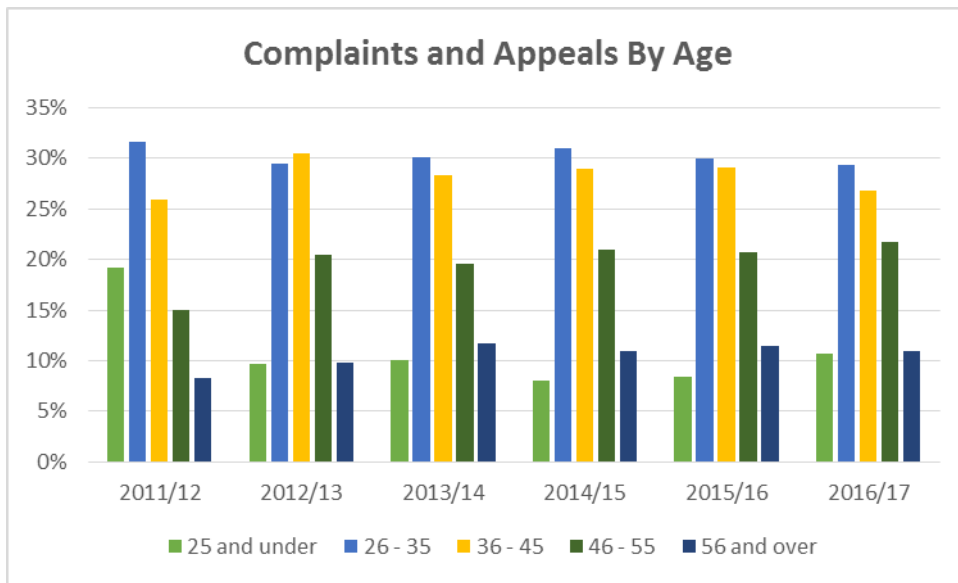
Student Complaints

Age

Complaints and Appeals

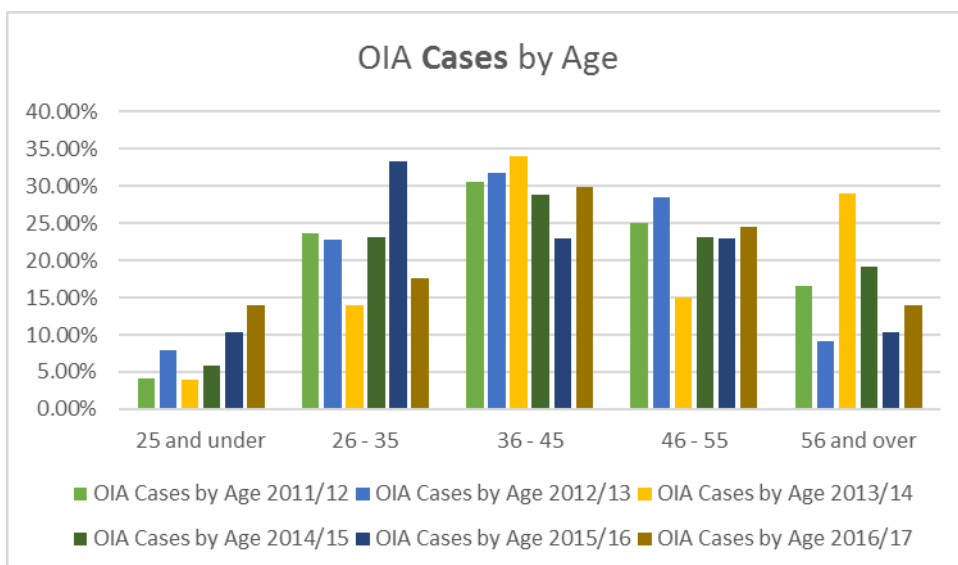
This chart demonstrates that in previous years, except in 2012/13, students in the 26 – 35 age category submitted the most complaints and appeals. The percentage of students who have complained has increased for the second year running in the 25 and under band and the percentage of the other age bands has remained largely unchanged.

Chart 1: Complaints and appeals cases, by age, 2011/11 – 2016/17



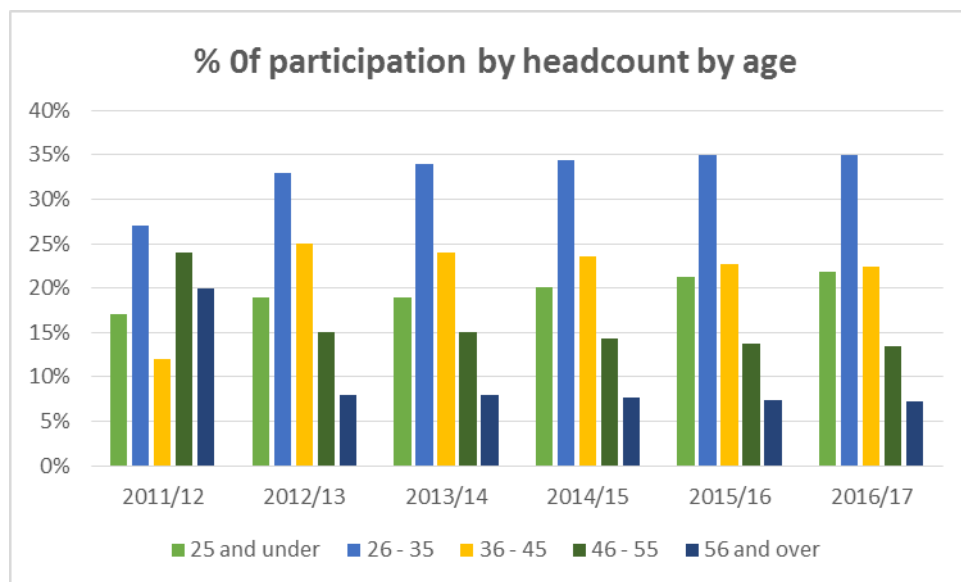
2016/17 saw an increase in the number of complaints and appeals referred to the OIA by students in the 25 and under age group.

Chart 2: OIA cases, by age, 2011/12 – 2016/17



Complaints and Appeals

Chart 3: Participation of all UK and non UK students including UG and PG, ITT students, Overseas Special Scheme students and full and part time Research Degree students by age, 2011/12 – 2016/17.



Student Complaints

Disability

Complaints and Appeals

The table below provides a breakdown of the total number of complaints and appeals received by the Open University in 2016/17 from students with a declared disability and those without. This is then compared to the overall University student population (excluding overseas students).

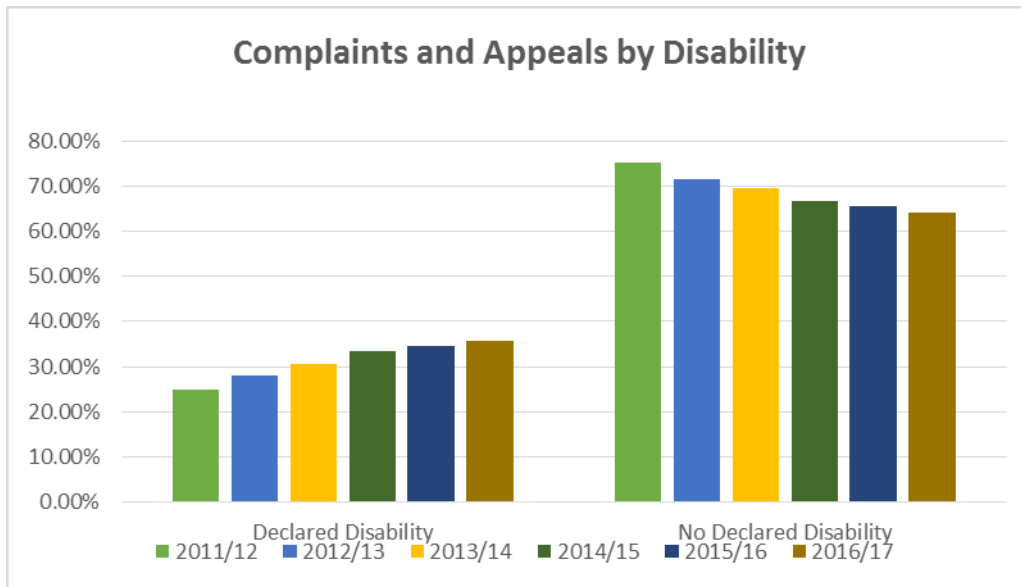
Table 4: Complaints and appeals cases, by disability, 2015/16

	Declared Disability	No Declared Disability	Total
Complaints Stage 1/Concern	686	1167	1853
Complaints Stage 2/Formal	123	175	298
Complaints Stage 3/Review	42	37	79
Complaints Total	851	1379	2230
Admin Appeal Stage 1 /Query	122	221	343
Academic Appeal stage1/Query	91	184	275
Appeal Admin stage 2 /Formal	15	44	59
Appeal Academic stage 2 /Formal	49	98	147
Appeal Academic stage 3 /Review	29	88	117
Appeal Admin stage 3/Review	4	8	12
TMA Appeal	82	224	306
Appeals Total	392	867	1259
Total Complaints & Appeals	1243	2246	3489
OIA cases	23	34	57
Grand Total	1266	2280	3546
Participation headcount - all UK students studying UG + PG courses including all Research students and ITE students 2012/13. This data excludes Overseas students	25076	108560	133636
Participation all UK students and studying UG + PG courses including all Research students and ITE students 2012/13. This data excludes Overseas students	18.76%	81.24%	100.00%
Complaints and Appeals %	35.63%	64.37%	100.00%
Complaints%	38.16%	61.84%	100.00%
Appeals%	31.46%	68.54%	100.00%
OIA Cases %	35.70%	64.30%	100.00%

Complaints and Appeals

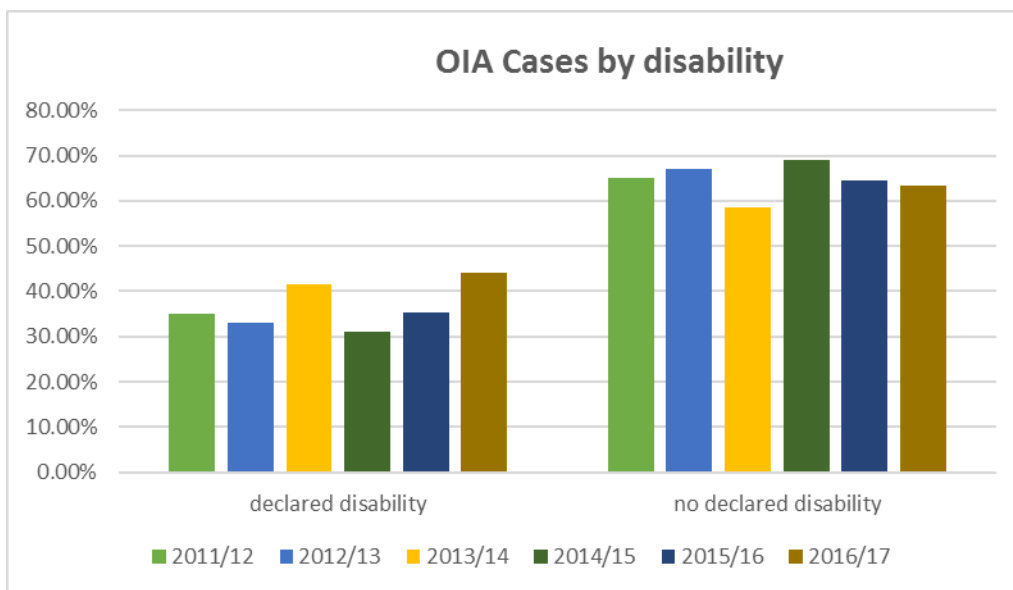
The proportion of students who have a declared disability (35.70%) who submit a complaint or appeal is higher than would be expected in comparison with the student population. It should be noted that the complaints and appeals received from students with a disability are not all regarding disability related issues.

Chart 4: Complaints and appeals cases, by disability, 2011/12 – 2016/17



The number of students with a declared disability who referred their complaint to the OIA increased in 2016/17. This figure is at its highest since 2011/12

Chart 5: OIA cases, by disability, 2011/12- 2016/17

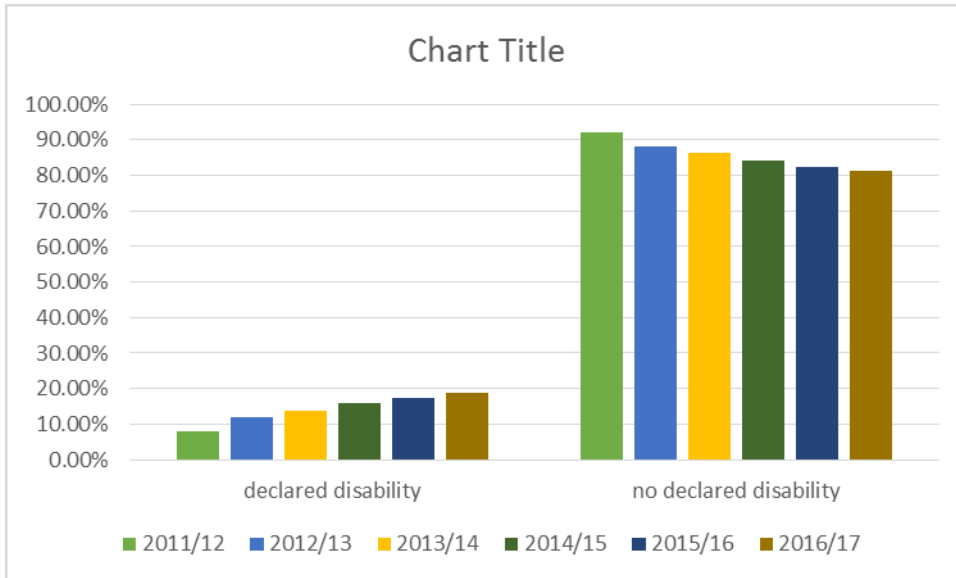


Student Complaints

Disability

Complaints and Appeals

Chart 6: Participation of all UK and including UG and PG, ITT students, and full and part time Research Degree students, but excluding students who are resident overseas, registered in 2016/17 with a declared disability compared with previous years.



Student Complaints

Ethnicity

Complaints and Appeals

The table below provides a breakdown of the total number of complaints and appeals received by the Open University in 2016/17 from students by ethnicity. This is then compared to the overall University student population.

Table 5: Complaints and appeals cases, by ethnicity, 2016/17

	Asian and black	Mixed and other	Ethnic minorities Total	White	Known Total	Unknown or refused	Grand Total
Complaints Stage 1/Concern	135	82	217	1554	1771	82	1853
complaints Stage 2/Formal	28	19	47	239	286	12	298
Complaints Stage 3/Review	6	2	8	65	73	6	79
Complaints Total	169	103	272	1858	2130	100	2230
Admin Appeal stage 1 /Query	40	17	57	263	320	23	343
Academic Appeal stage1/Query	53	13	66	203	269	6	275
Appeal Admin stage 2 /Formal	12	2	14	40	54	5	59
Appeal Academic stage 2 /Formal	13	7	20	121	141	6	147
Appeal Academic stage 3 /Review	13	0	13	99	112	5	117
Appeal Admin stage 3/Review	2	0	2	9	11	1	12
TMA Appeal	23	6	29	268	297	9	306
Appeals Total	156	45	201	1003	1204	55	1259
Total Complaints & Appeals	325	148	473	2861	3334	155	3489
OIA cases	2	2	4	50	54	3	57
Grand Total	327	150	477	2911	3388	158	3546
Participation headcount all UK students studying UG + PG courses including all Research and ITE students 2012/13.	9310	3942	13252	111180	124432	2136	126568
Participation % all UK students studying UG + PG courses including all Research students and ITE students 2012/13	7.48%	3.17%	10.65%	89.35%	100.00%	1.69%	
Complaints and Appeals %	9.31%	4.24%	13.56%	82.00%	95.56%	4.44%	100%
Complaints%	7.58%	4.62%	12.20%	83.32%	95.52%	4.48%	100%
Appeals%	12.39%	3.57%	16%	80%	96%	4%	100%
OIA Cases %	3.51%	3.51%	7.02%	87.72%	94.74%	5.26%	100%

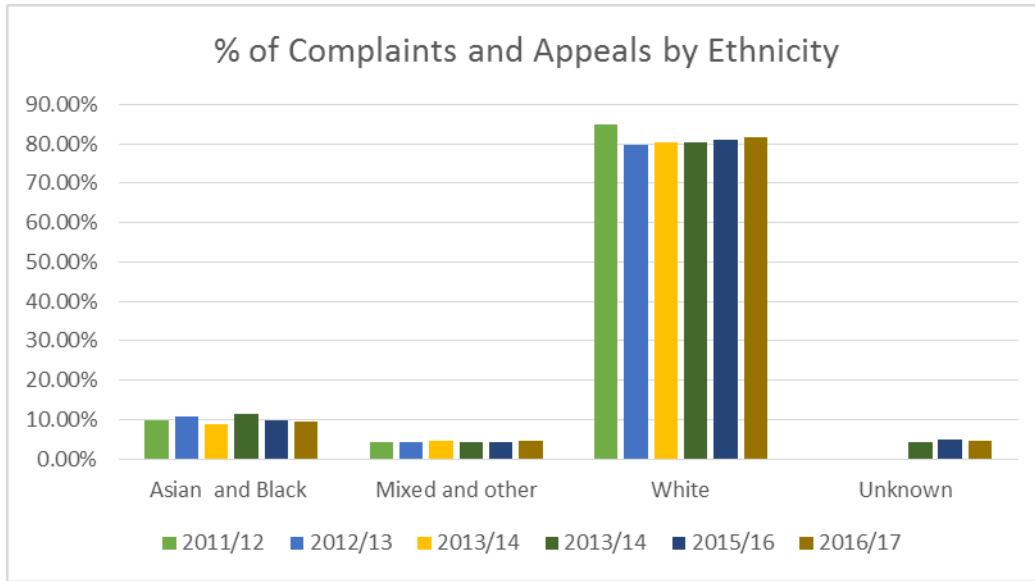
Student Complaints

Ethnicity

Complaints and Appeals

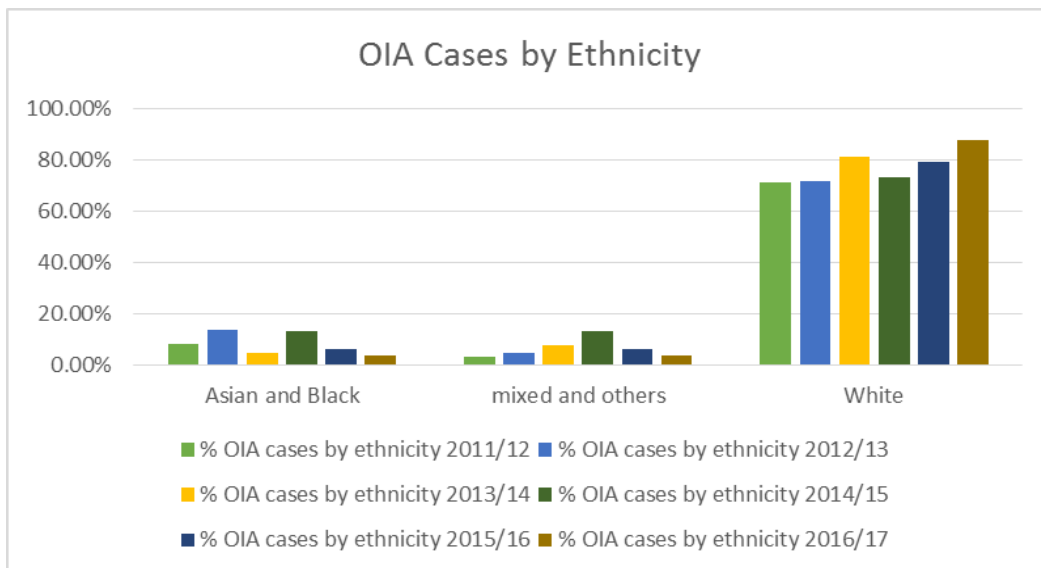
The number of complaints and appeals received from students of Asian and Black ethnicity has decreased slightly in 2016/17, remaining less than 10% of students who complain or appeal. The number of complainants/appellants in the other ethnic groups has largely remained unchanged.

Chart 7: Complaints and appeals cases, by ethnicity, 2011/12 - 2016/17



The percentage of non – white students who have complained to the OIA has decreased for the second year running.

Chart 8: OIA cases, by ethnicity, 2011/12 – 2016/17

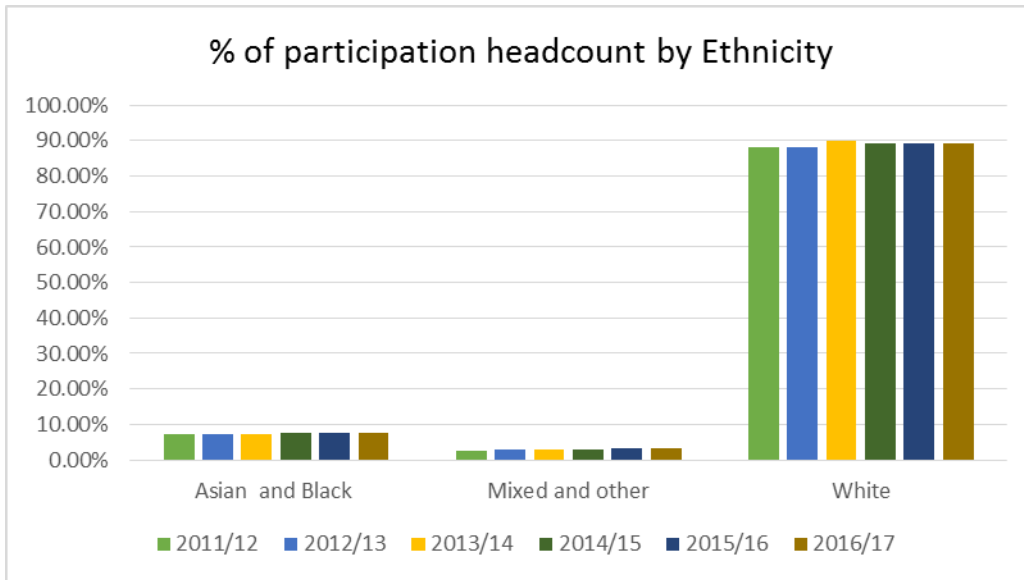


Student Complaints

Ethnicity

Complaints and Appeals

Chart 9: Participation of all UK students including UG and PG, ITT students and full and part time Research Degree students but excluding all overseas and non-UK students, by ethnicity, 2011/12-2016/17



Student Complaints

Gender

Complaints and Appeals

The table below provides a breakdown of the total number of Complaints and Appeals received by the Open University in 2016/17 from students by gender. This is then compared to the overall University student population.

Table 6: Complaints and appeals cases, by gender, 2016/17

	Male	Female	Known Total	Unknown	Grand Total
Complaints Stage 1/Concern	727	1116	1843	10	1853
Complaints Stage 2/Formal	118	179	297	1	298
Complaints Stage 3/Review	31	47	78	1	79
Complaints Total	876	1342	2218	12	2230
Admin Appeal Stage 1 /Query	118	222	340	3	343
Academic Appeal stage1/Query	129	146	275	0	275
Appeal Admin stage 2 /Formal	22	37	59	0	59
Appeal Academic stage 2 /Formal	40	106	146	1	147
Appeal Academic stage 3 /Review	43	74	117	0	117
Appeal Admin stage 3/Review	5	7	12	0	12
TMA Appeal	125	181	306	0	306
Appeals Total	482	773	1255	4	1259
Total Complaints & Appeals	1358	2115	3473	16	3489
OIA cases	27	30	57	0	57
Grand Total	1385	2145	3530	16	3546
Participation headcount all UK students studying UG + PG courses including all Research and ITE students 2012/13.	53972	79956	133928	0	133928
Participation % all UK students studying UG + PG courses including all Research students and ITE students 2012/13	40.30%	59.70%	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Complaints and Appeals %	38.92%	60.62%	99.54%	0.46%	100%
Complaints%	39.28%	60.18%	99.46%	0.51%	100%
Appeals%	38.28%	61.40%	99.68%	0.32%	100%
OIA Cases %	47.37%	52.63%	100.00%	0.00%	100%

Student Complaints

Gender

Complaints and Appeals

As the University population consists of more female than male students it is expected that a higher number of female students would submit a complaint/appeal.

In 2016/17 11.1% more female student referred their cases to the OIA than male student. Apart from 2012/13 it has been the case that more male students referred their complaint/appeal to the OIA than female students.

Chart 10: Complaints and appeals cases, by gender 2011/12-2016/17

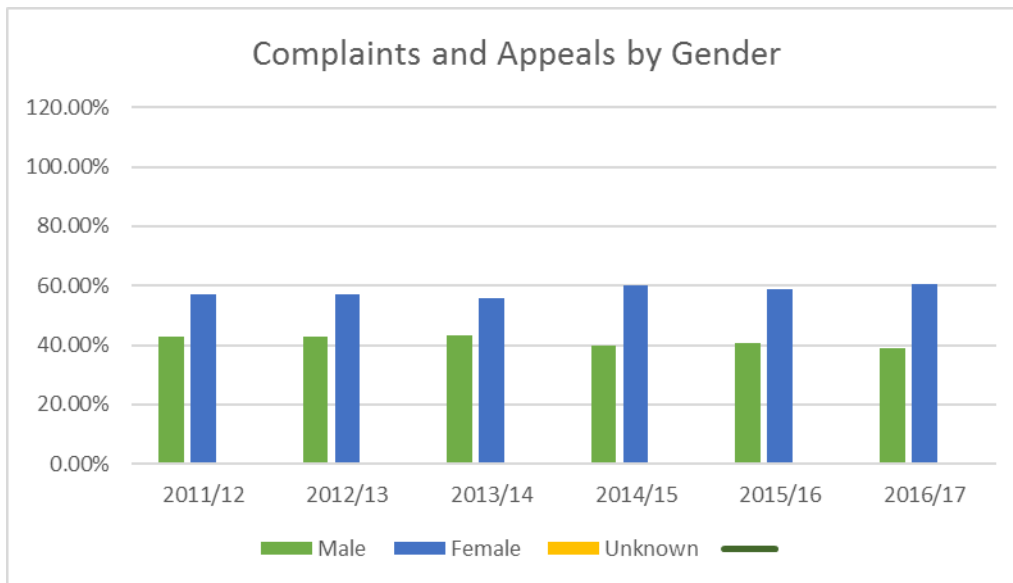
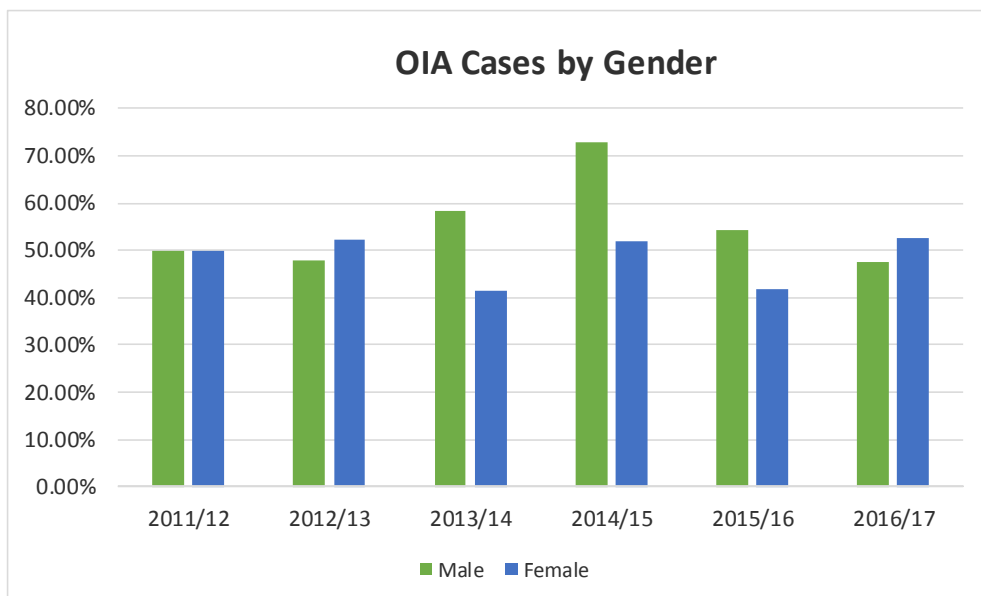


Chart 11: OIA cases, by gender 2011/12-2016/17



Student Complaints

Gender

Complaints and Appeals

Chart 12: Participation of all UK and non UK students including UG and PG, ITT students, Overseas Special Scheme students and full and part time Research Degree students by gender, 2011/12 – 2016/17

