

## **Student disciplinary, grievance and appeals cases (2010/11)**

### **Student Cases**

This section explains the way in which the School deals with student appeals, disciplinary and grievance cases. These types of cases are sometimes based upon, the result of, or influenced by equality and diversity issues. For example, an allegation of harassment might be based on one of the nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act, or it might be the case that the School refrains from conducting a disciplinary investigation because the defendant is experiencing health problems. On the whole, however, the annual figures and substance of student cases reveal no clear pattern of equality and diversity issues arising or not being addressed. We hope to improve this analysis in future years by looking at ways in which the overall composition of complainants can be analysed.

### **Types of Cases**

Appeals cases can occur in different areas of the School, but can be defined generally as a student challenging the mark s/he has received for a piece of assessed work on grounds of procedural irregularity and/or mitigating circumstances. Grievances, or complaints, occur when a student wants the School to address what s/he considers to be a shortcoming on the part of the School or an individual within it. We sometimes receive academic grievances about a programme of student, or a service complaint about a facility or service that is provided by the Central Administration of the School. In the context of an individual, a grievance case can sometimes involve an allegation of bullying or harassment. Disciplinary cases normally involve the School investigating allegations of misconduct against our students, usually in a personal behaviour or social context.

### **Number of Cases**

The School received no allegations of harassment from or against a student last academic year (2010/11), compared to two in 2009/10 which both involved a student claiming to have been harassed by a member of staff. One of those cases was upheld. The School also upheld one of two disciplinary cases which arose in 2010/11. It involved a student being punished for abusing a member of staff in the School's library, though this behaviour was not considered to be harassment.

Academic misconduct cases normally concern the actions of a student in an examination or the way s/he has produced a piece of assessed work. Plagiarism and cheating are two obvious examples. The School dealt with thirteen misconduct cases in 2010/11, none of which occurred because of an equality and diversity issue. This said, the School does record the nationality of academic misconduct cases, as it does for appeals against academic marks, to help us identify whether any cultural issues might lie behind the number and types of cases which arise. There was no conclusive evidence last academic year.

Academic appeals are consistently the most numerous type of cases which the School has to deal with each academic year, although there has been no obvious trend detected in the context of equality and diversity matters. The majority of cases normally involve appeals which are based on mitigating circumstances, such as ill health or domestic issues. Fifteen of the 115 appeal cases in 2010/11 were submitted on grounds of disability, which primarily concerned mental health or neurodiversity issues. It is not possible to provide an outcome figure for these cases,

because many are still on-going at the time of writing this summary. We received five additional appeals with regard to PhDs programmes, although all of them were based on academic reasons.

Complaints about academic and service matters can sometimes involve an equality and diversity angle, particularly if a student feels that the School has in some way failed in its duty of care towards them. However, neither of the two formal complaints which were made to the School in 2010/11 concerned diversity issues.

### **Informal Cases**

The commentary above applies to formal student cases. However, it should be noted that many of the equality and diversity issues which do arise in the School are dealt with on an informal basis by one or a combination of the services offered by the School or Students' Union. These services include academic and welfare advisers, the Deans' Office, student counsellors, the Disability Office and Wardens in halls of residence.