

Protecting staff and students during complex casework involving troubling complaints

Professor Helen James Eur Ing, CEng, FIMechE, FHEA, BSc Hons, MA,
DBA

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education & Student Experience)

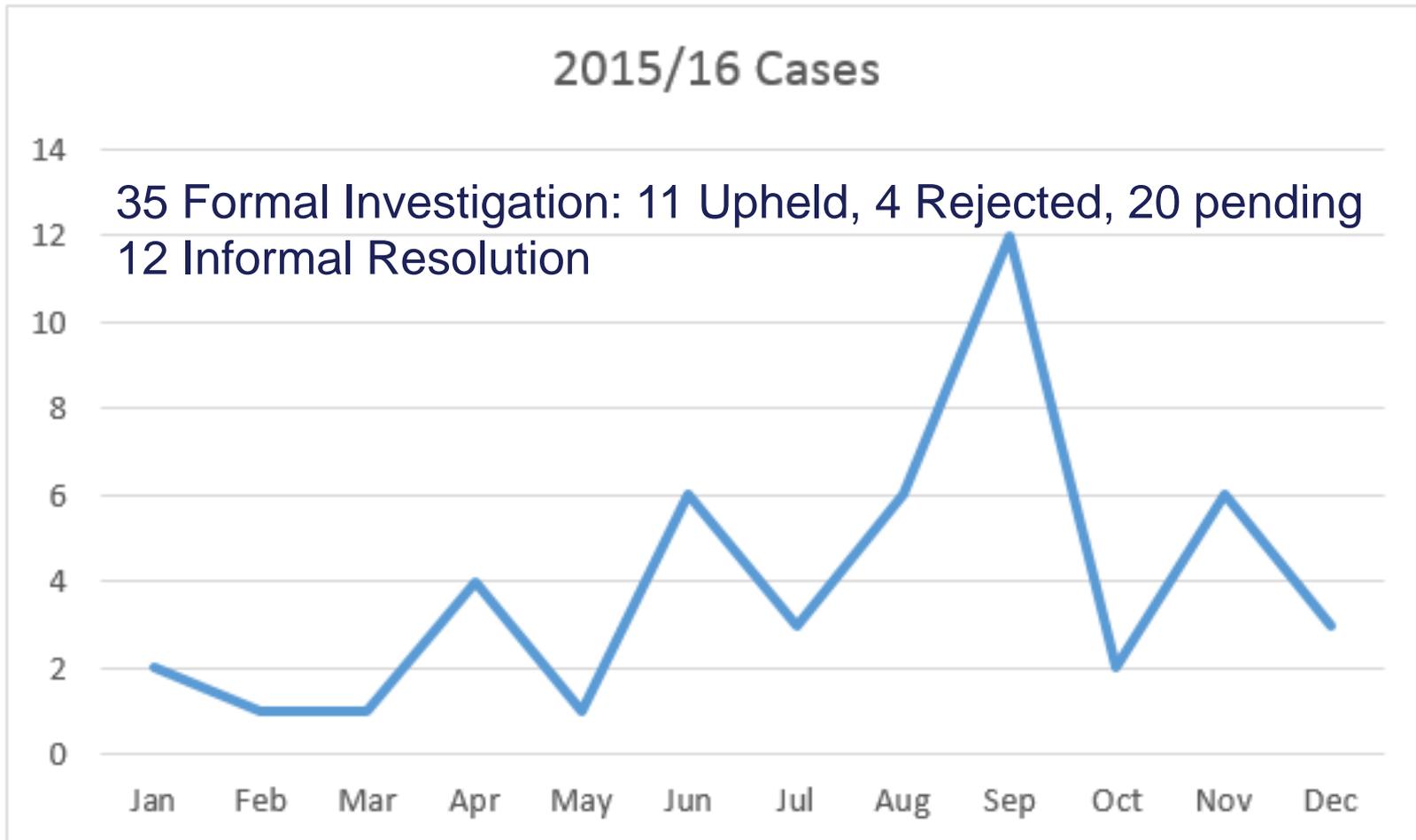
25th April, 2017 London

Our Values

- the development of the whole person, respecting and nurturing the inherent dignity and potential of each individual
- the integration of excellent teaching, research and knowledge exchange
- the power of higher education to enrich individuals, communities and nations
- our friendly, inclusive and professional community of students and staff, preparing individuals to contribute to a just and sustainable future.

Student Complaints

Figure 2 Distribution of Complaints across the year



Complaints, 2015/16- key themes

- Assessment/exam administration
- Unsatisfactory supervision/teaching
- Fee/Bursary issue
- Insufficient advice/support

Complaints, 2015/16- Recommendations

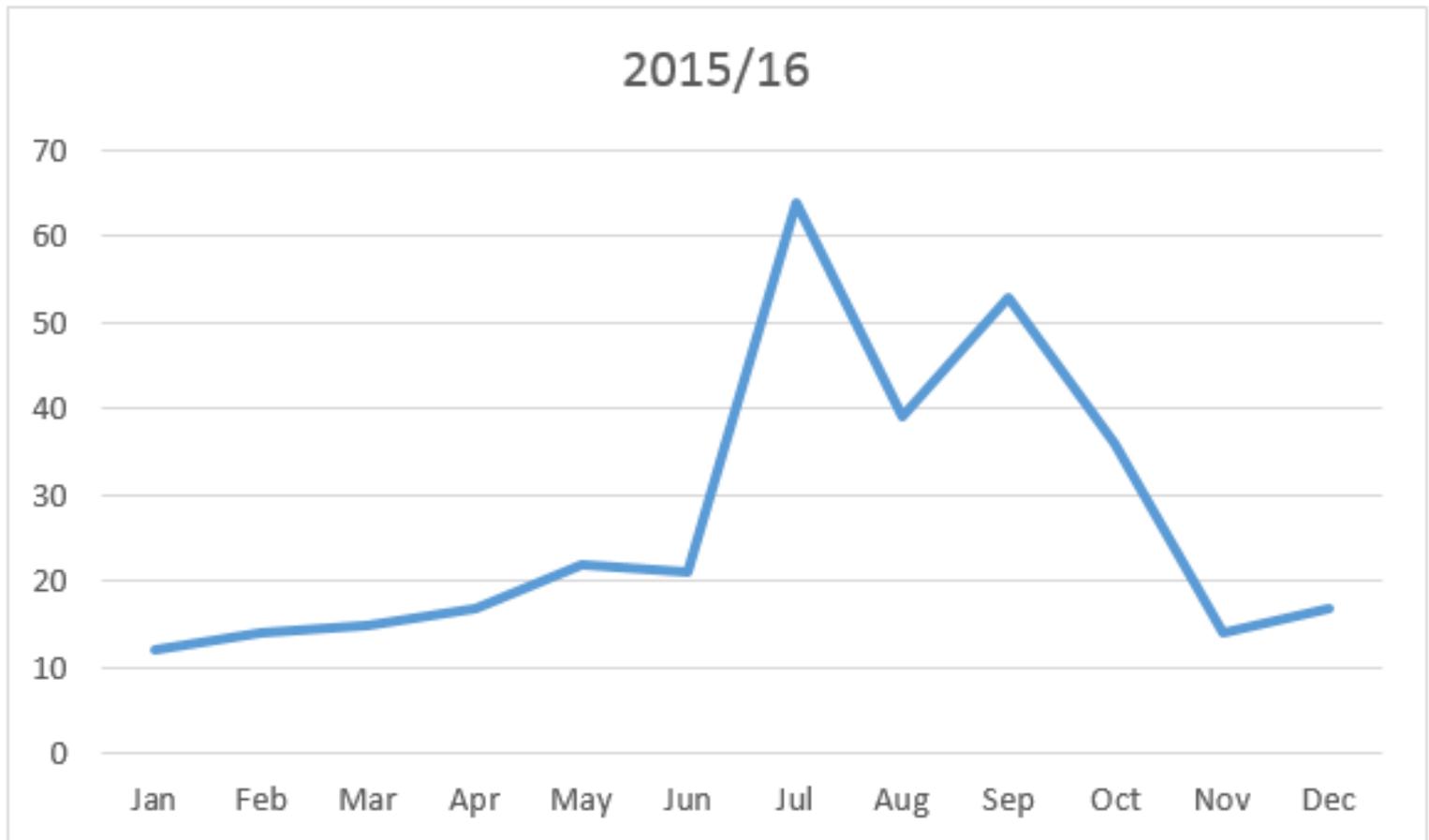
- Additional reporting of informal resolutions
- Additional reporting of reviews submitted to VC's office
- Process-enhance understanding of complaints and appeals procedures to reduce dual or incorrect submission
- Resolution- process through which financial resolutions are agreed are formalised and appropriately reported

Appeals- Trend

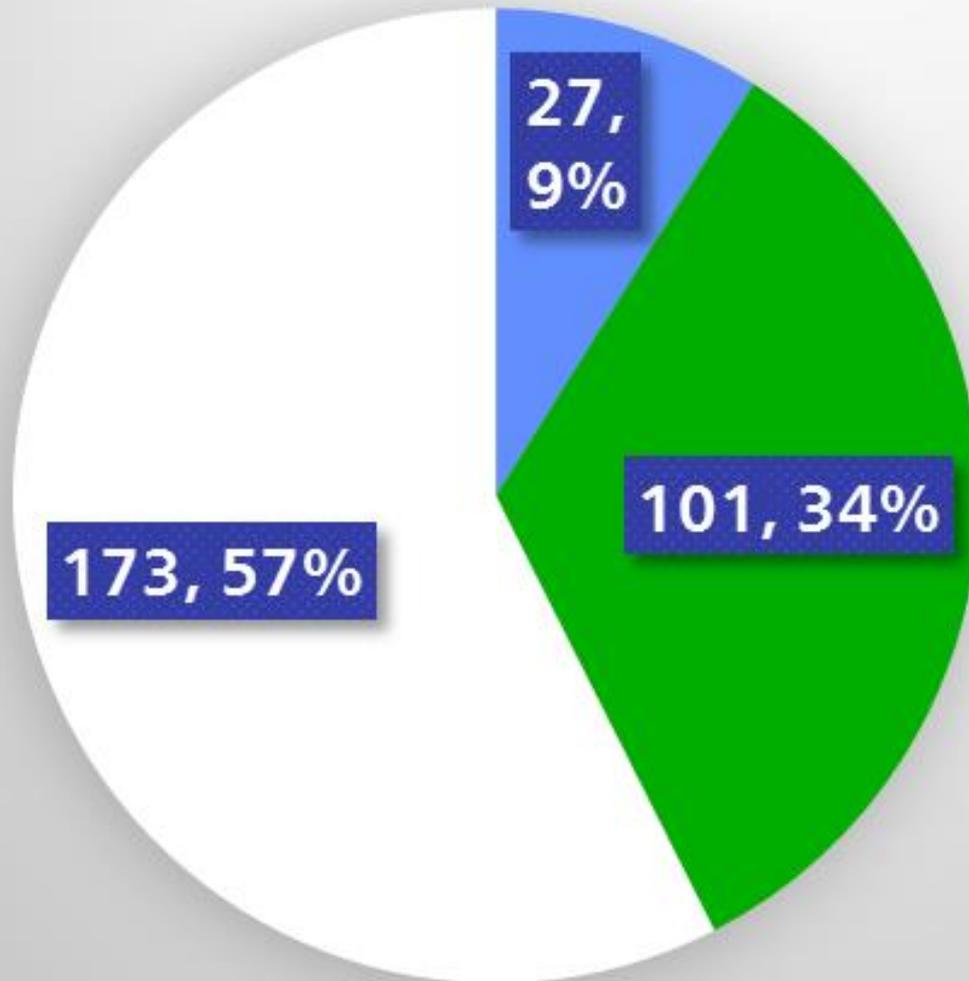
	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
No appeals lodged	115	127	137	149	175	318	297	262	313
No of panels convened	16	2	6	11	8	20	29		
No of Investigations								19	27

Appeals

Table 2 Distribution of requests for the year



Appeals, 2015/16



■ Formal Investigation

■ No grounds found

■ Informal resolution Reached

Appeals, 2015/16

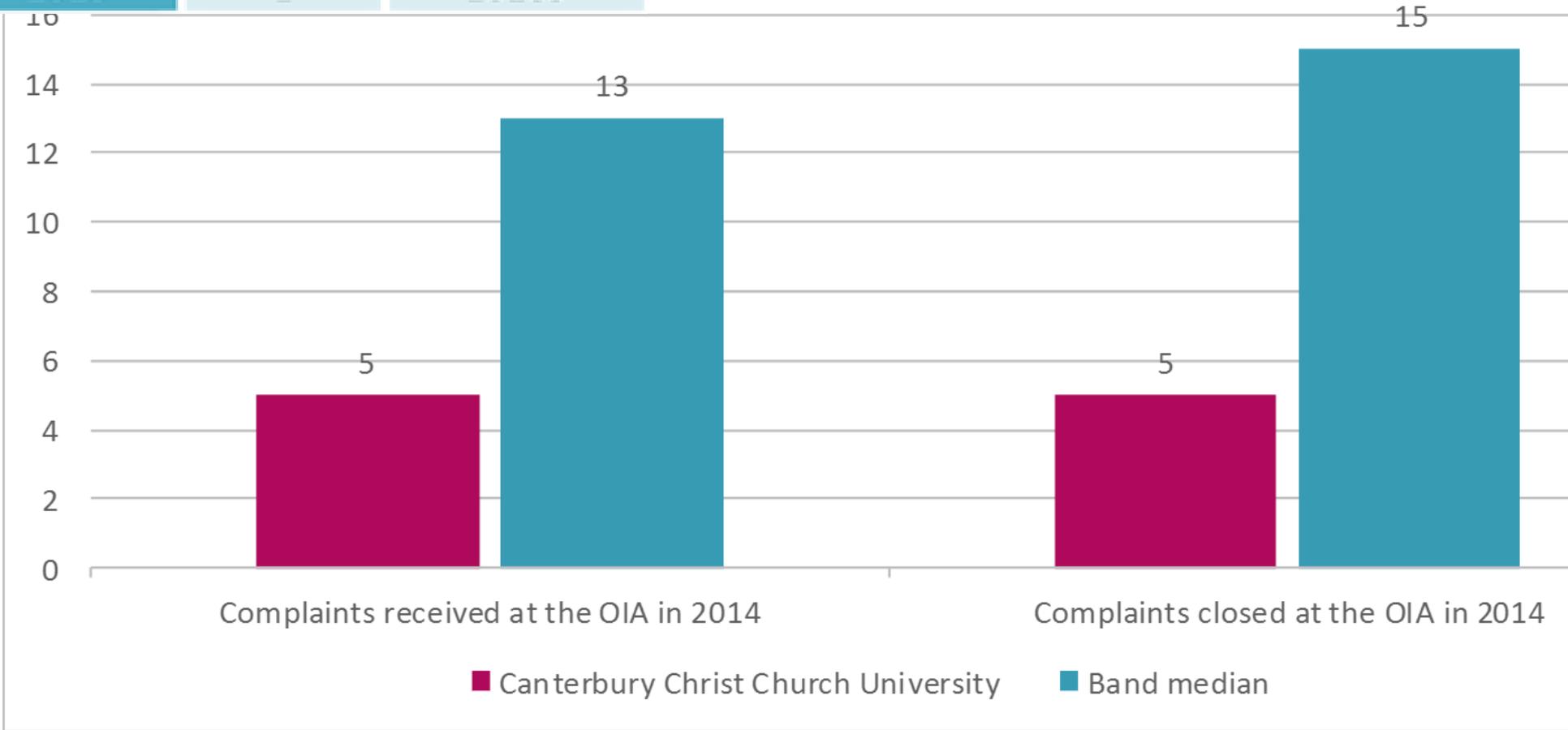
- Declared disability are over represented by 9% compared to HESA population
- Mental health (13) 4.2%; 1.7% HESA
- Learning difficulty (36) 11.4%; 7.7% HESA
- 2 or more impairments/or disabling medical conditions (5) 1.5%; 0.4% HESA
- No disability (241) 77%; 86.4% HESA
- Ethnicity, BME (124) 40%; 19% HESA



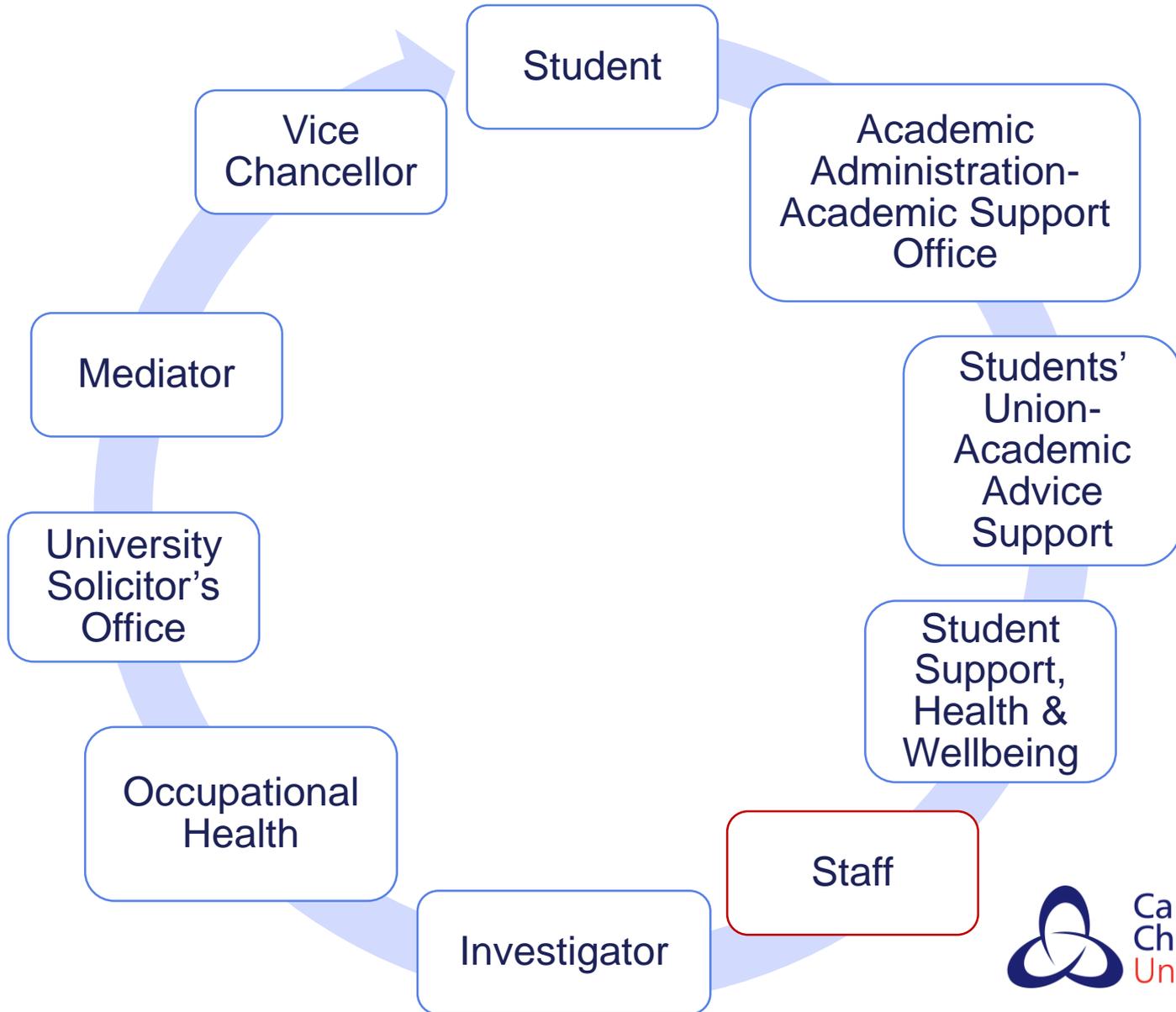
Canterbury Christ Church University

Year	OIA Band	Number of students
2014	E	19105
2013	E	18185

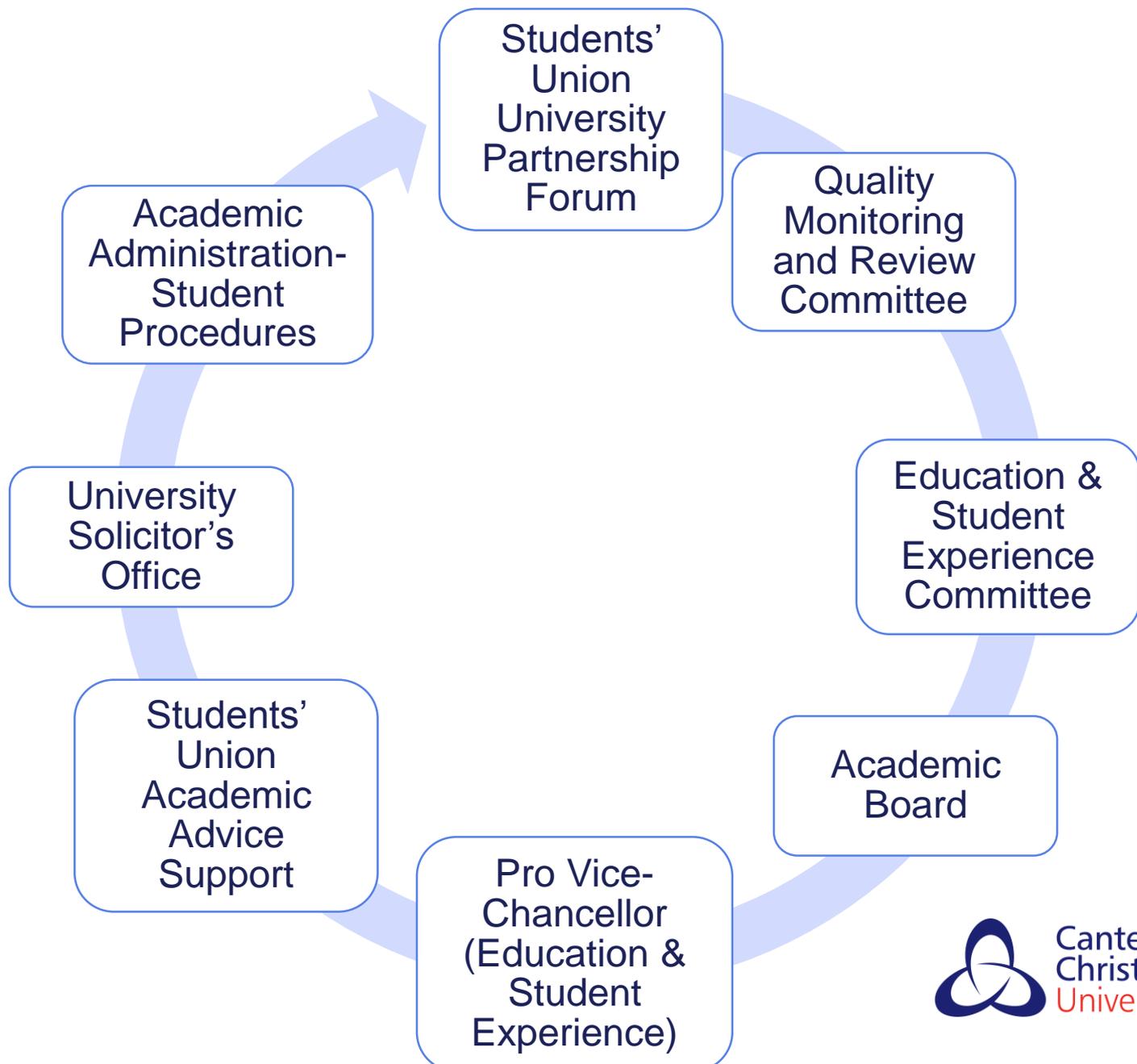
complaints received and closed



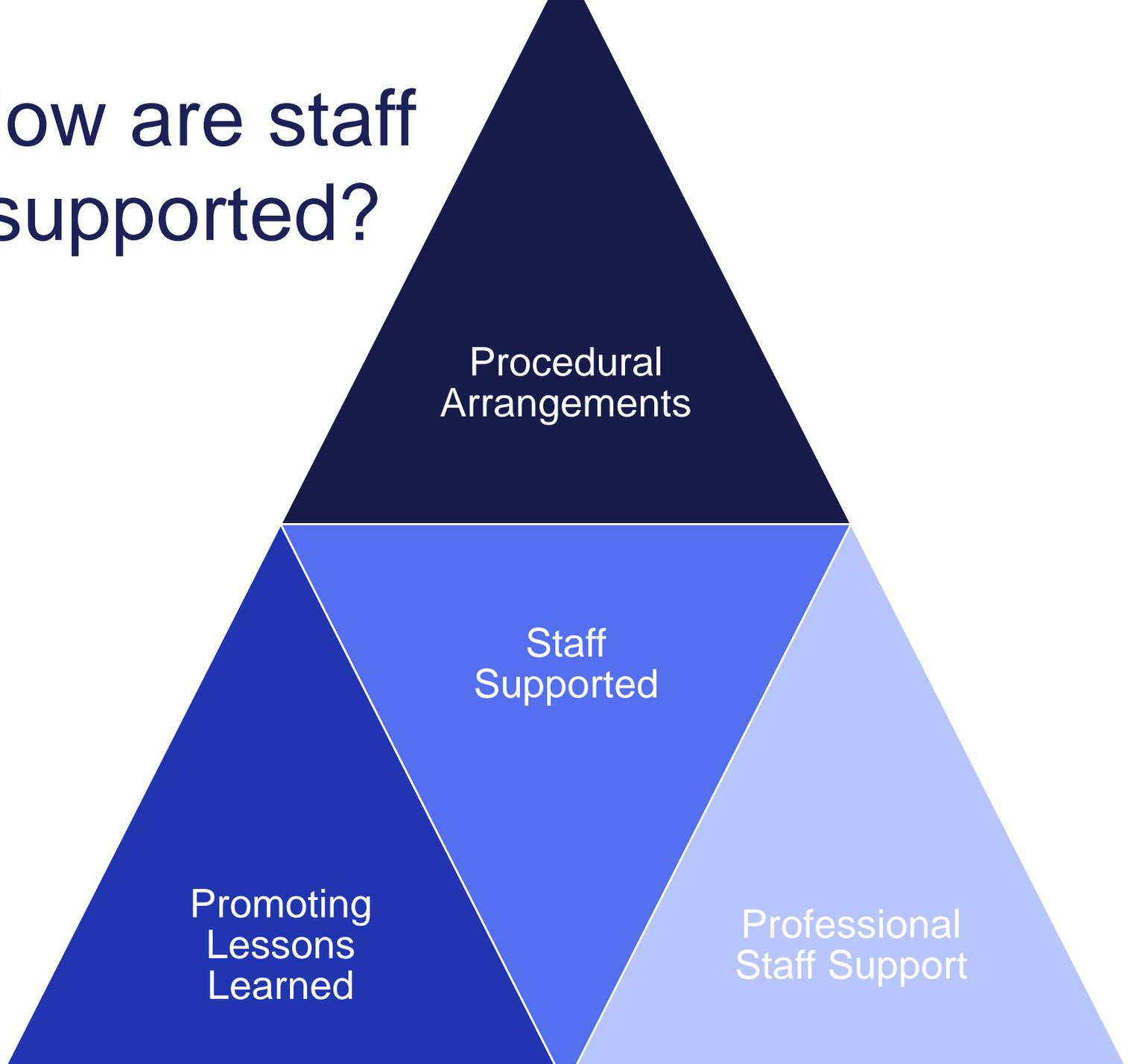
Agents



Enhancement



How are staff supported?



Interaction with HR

- The student procedures are separate from HR procedures
- Where on first review a complaint concerns staff misconduct that is a disciplinary matter, the investigation is undertaken through HR procedures, including Staff Union representation
- Communications maintained with the student, although there are challenges with what can be said

Institutional Case Study

‘Jeremy’

Jeremy

- Jeremy had multiple disabilities, including mental health issues
- In his second year, he was offended by comments from a fellow student
- The University investigated and recommended a written apology from the other student, but this was not followed through by the University as the investigator did not address how it was to be done
- Jeremy was not happy with the investigation and asked for a review, which decided the investigation was done properly and was reasonable
- The OIA found the complaint partly justified
- Jeremy then submitted in the final year, eight further complaints and two appeals

Resolving Jeremy's Complaints

- A bad experience led to Jeremy becoming critical of everything we did – and it led to complaints both about the School and the central services
- The root cause was that Jeremy did not think we were taking him seriously – and in some cases Jeremy was not being taken seriously
- It became hard to manage Jeremy's expectations – it required intervention by Jeremy's solicitor (one complaint), mediation (two complaints) and the OIA (two complaints, one appeal, three not justified), as well as several investigations
- What enabled a resolution (and Jeremy thinking well of the University in the end) was listening to Jeremy, talking to Jeremy as an equal, acknowledging and apologising for mistakes and offering (modest) compensation

Implications of Jeremy for supporting staff

- This was an expensive case – in time rather than money
- However, the experiences led to the significant review of our procedures to place emphasis on talking through issues and making them resolution orientated
- It became complex – but was simplified to reach the final resolution
 - A case handler took over all discussions with Jeremy – and built trust
 - The case handler identified the key issues of dispute
 - The case handler used mediating principles to talk to staff and Jeremy, and work within the procedures to reach a resolution
- Complaints do not rise in a vacuum – an important part has to be understanding the nature of our students and act preventively – and this requires institutional learning and staff development

Thank you for listening

I would now like to invite questions