

Complaints – what's not to love about them?

Four 'positive' points for universities when welcoming the 'negative'

Today's key points

**Welcome
complaints**

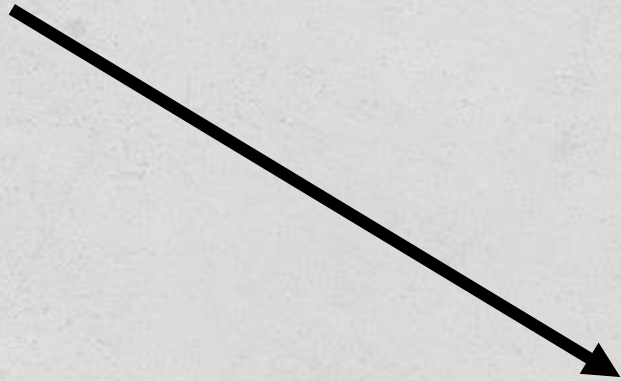
**Embed
structure**

**Data
Data
Data**

**Oversight
and accountability**

Welcome all complaints

Complaints matter.



Complainants matter.

We are "all ears"

- We regularly ask for feedback
- We openly ask students to try resolving their issue 'locally' – not avoiding the complaint, rather an opportunity for a speedier direct fix.
- Highlighting the Local Resolution stage
 - Allows for **early intervention**
 - demonstrates that staff at all levels are **willing to help** if it is within their ability to do so



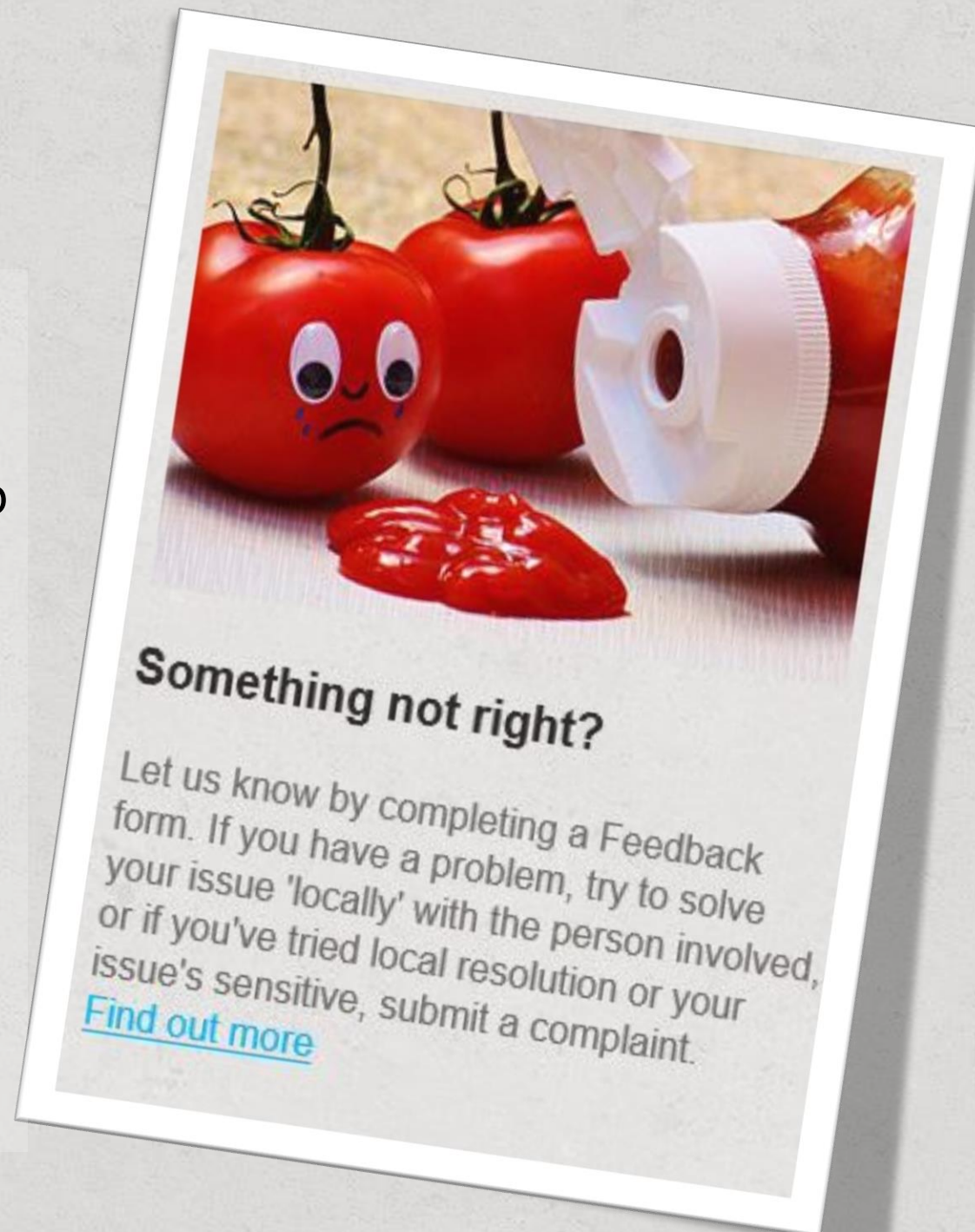
We're listening.

At Swinburne, we welcome your feedback. If you have a compliment or suggestion, complete our feedback form. If you have a concern, you can [resolve your issue locally](#), or for serious issues like bullying or harassment, lodge a complaint.

[Find out more](#)

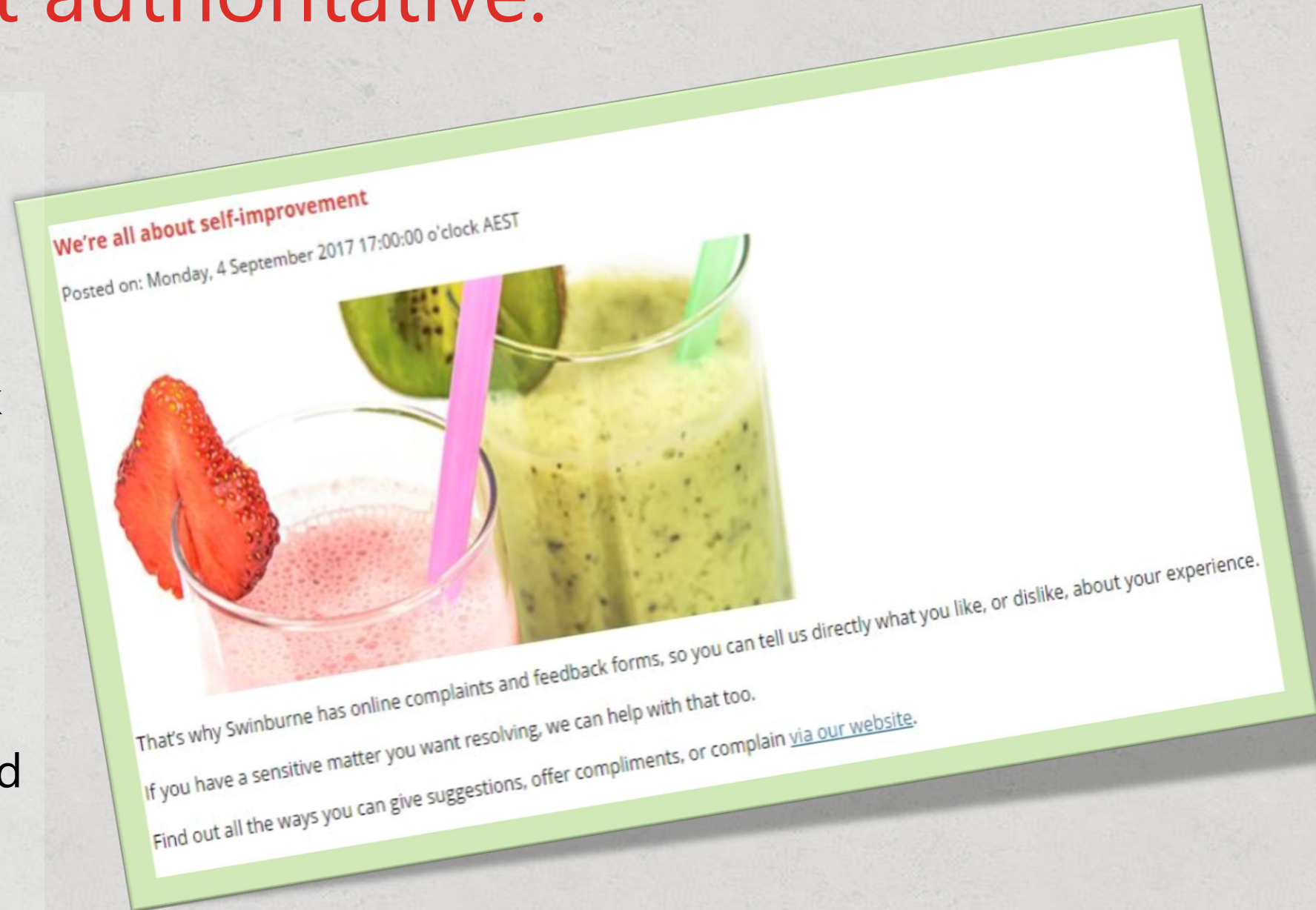
Asking for feedback:

- Builds a receptive culture
- Generates trust and reinforces commitment to support students
- Sends the message that the organisation will not shy away from *negative* feedback
- Promotes our values of integrity and accountability



Relatable, not authoritative.

- Student-friendly images and words
- Catchy phrases or pictures, not just stock photos of students
- Our **Student Comms** team takes a lead role in how the complaints framework is promoted



Engage complainants in meaningful ways

- Take each complaint seriously
- The power of talking
- Take time to consider all sides and all information
- Dispel any fears of reprisal
- Manage expectations
 - Timeframe within which to expect a resolution
 - Discussing realistic outcomes upfront



Embed structure and process



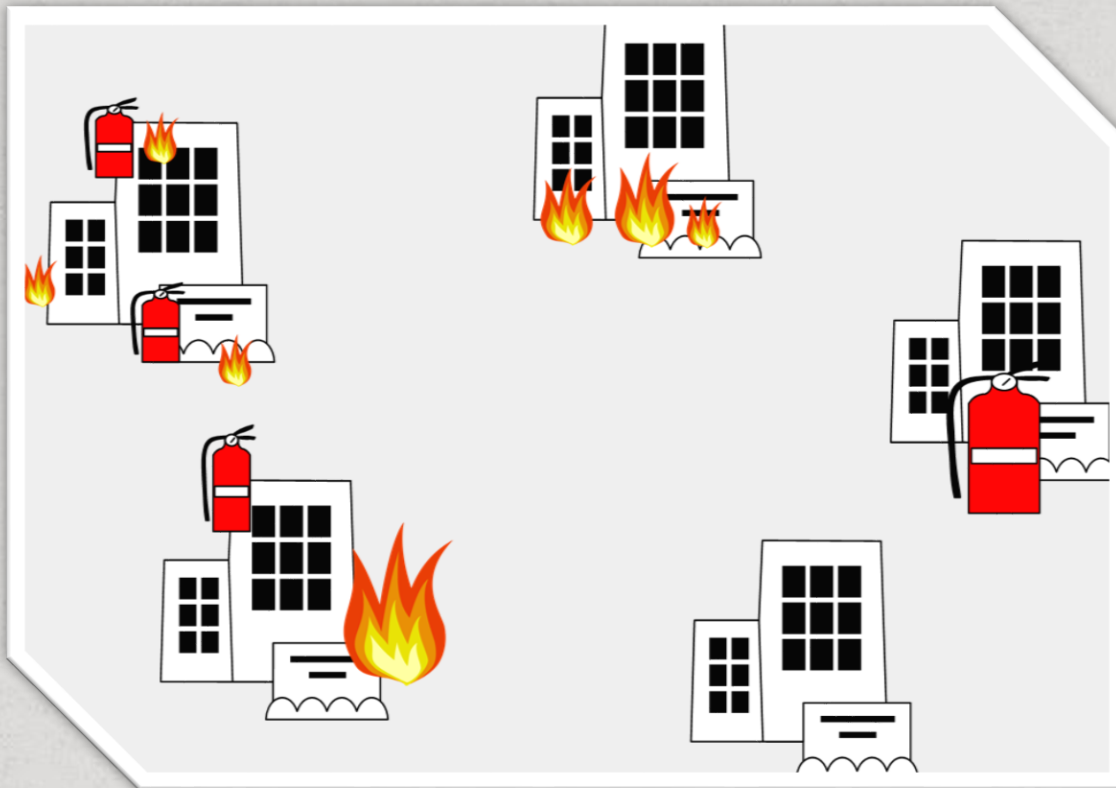
Well-considered processes lead to faster and less complicated resolutions

Previously:

Complaints handled **departmentally**

They were treated similar to **spot-fires**

Putting out spot-fires was **dependent** upon the internal resourcing and understanding.



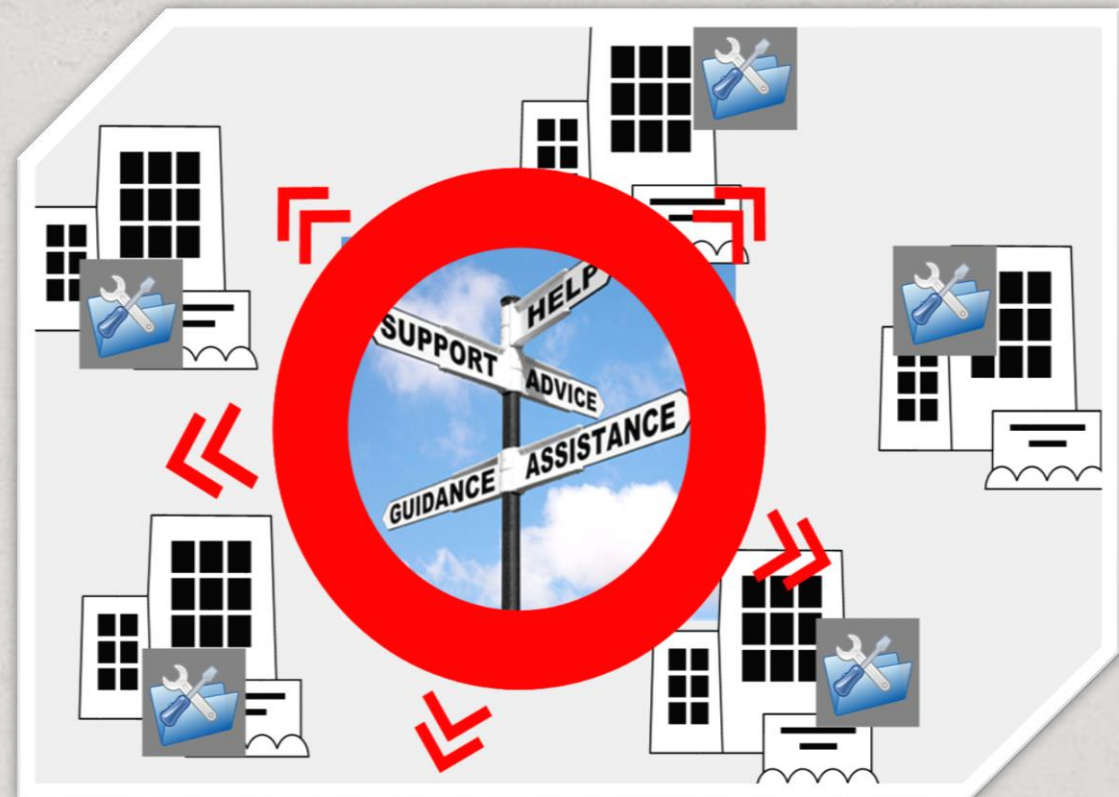
Reactive

Current:

Complaints triaged centrally

They are then managed as cases by departmental staff called Feedback Advisers

Departments are enabled with tools, advice and administrative support



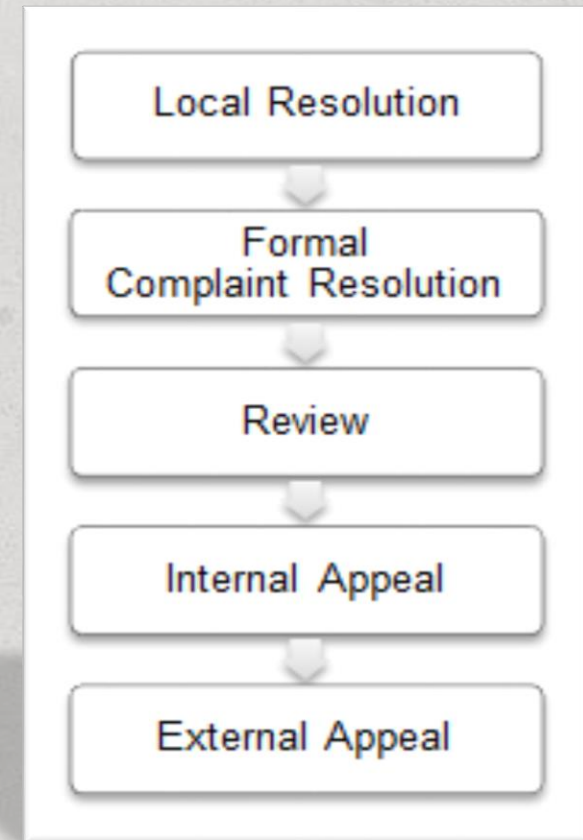
Proactive

Embedding structure is gold

- Centralised triage
 - Full visibility, access, system, filter
- Decentralised resolution
 - More effective.
 - Problems solved by the right staff and subject matter experts.
- Managing vexatious complainants by putting structure around them

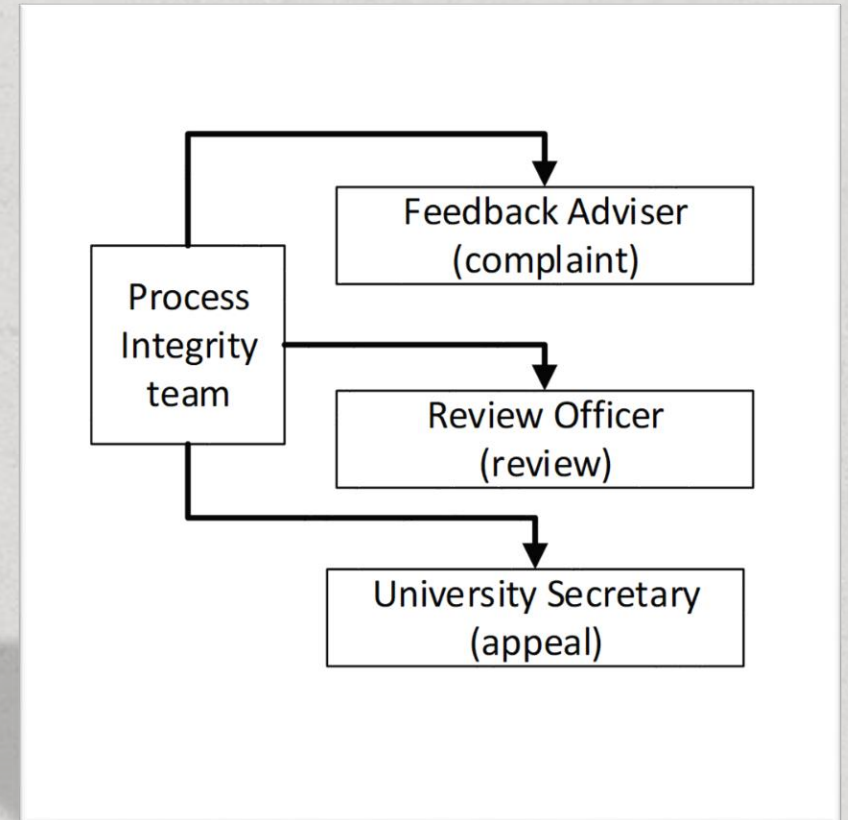
Successful structure

- Process
 - Clearly defined process
 - Transparent levels of escalation
 - University-wide consistency
- Work Instructions
- Guidelines



Successful structure

- People
 - Process Integrity team
 - Feedback Advisers within every department
 - Escalation avenues through
 - Review Officers
 - University Secretary
- Training
- Communication



Without structure, what
lasting impression sticks with
our students?



Data Data Data



DATA



KNOWLEDGE



ACTION

“What gets measured, gets managed.” Peter Drucker

Collecting data systematically

“Unless you have an effective system for recording complaints, it will be difficult to harness complaint information to improve your services.”

Ombudsman Victoria

Good complaints data means we can:

FIX PROBLEMS

- improve the issues, matters and services that were the reason for a complaint

CHECK PROCESSES

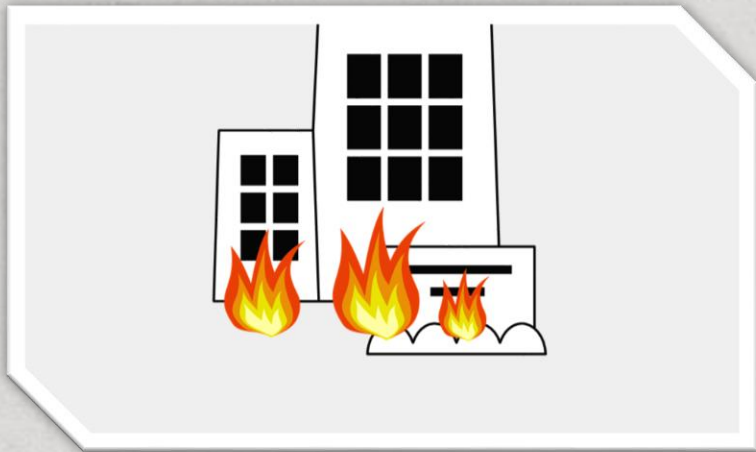
- assess the complaint handling function itself to enhance the method of resolving complaints

REPORT OUTCOMES

- report all sorts of information to senior management as required

Identifying hot spots

A concentration of complaints in one area, or on one topic, or for a particular cohort of students.



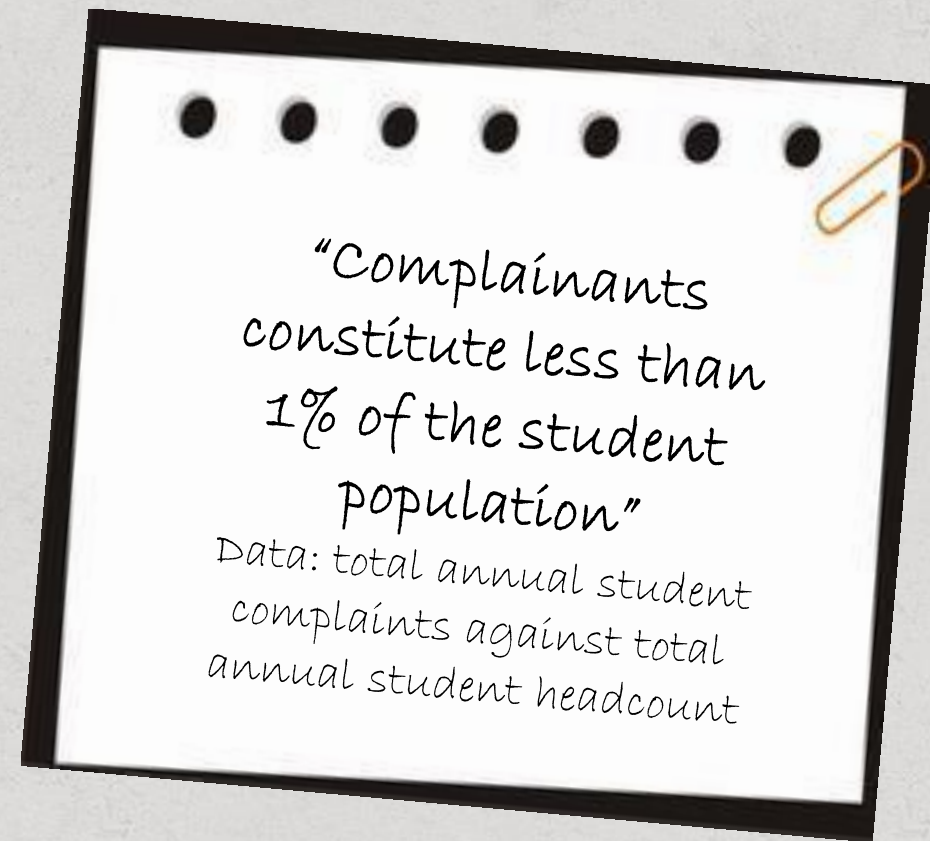
“Timetable complaints rose, but as a percentage of the student population they are not significant. Student concerns included difficulties with the system and registration, lecture times, classroom suitability for class type or size. Four complainants were impacted by the same technical issue, and five complainants experienced a shared delay in timetabling. These were addressed at the time.”

Hot spots provide opportunity to assess...

- What's the nature of the complaints?
- How is the department typically responding to the complaints?
- Underlying causes seen from an objective perspective?
- Do senior management know? Let's tell them.
- Make a recommendation on a strategy based on data.
- Watch whether strategy reduces the number of complaints
- Incorporate into a focal report later in the year

Slice and Dice data

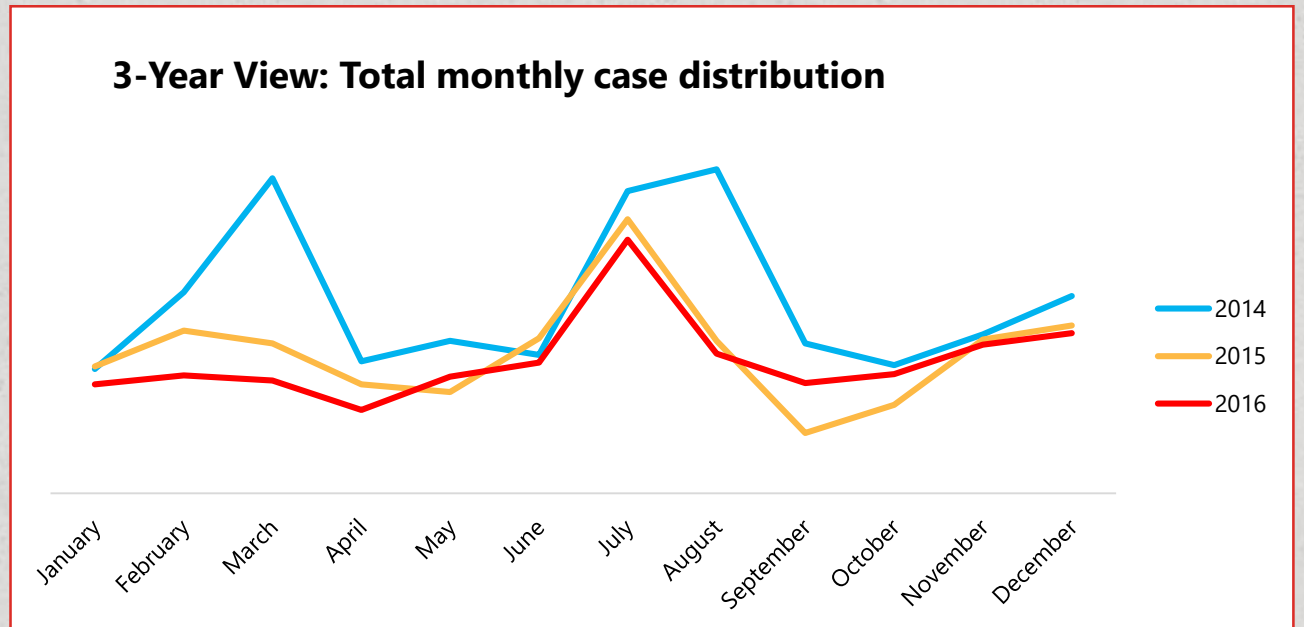
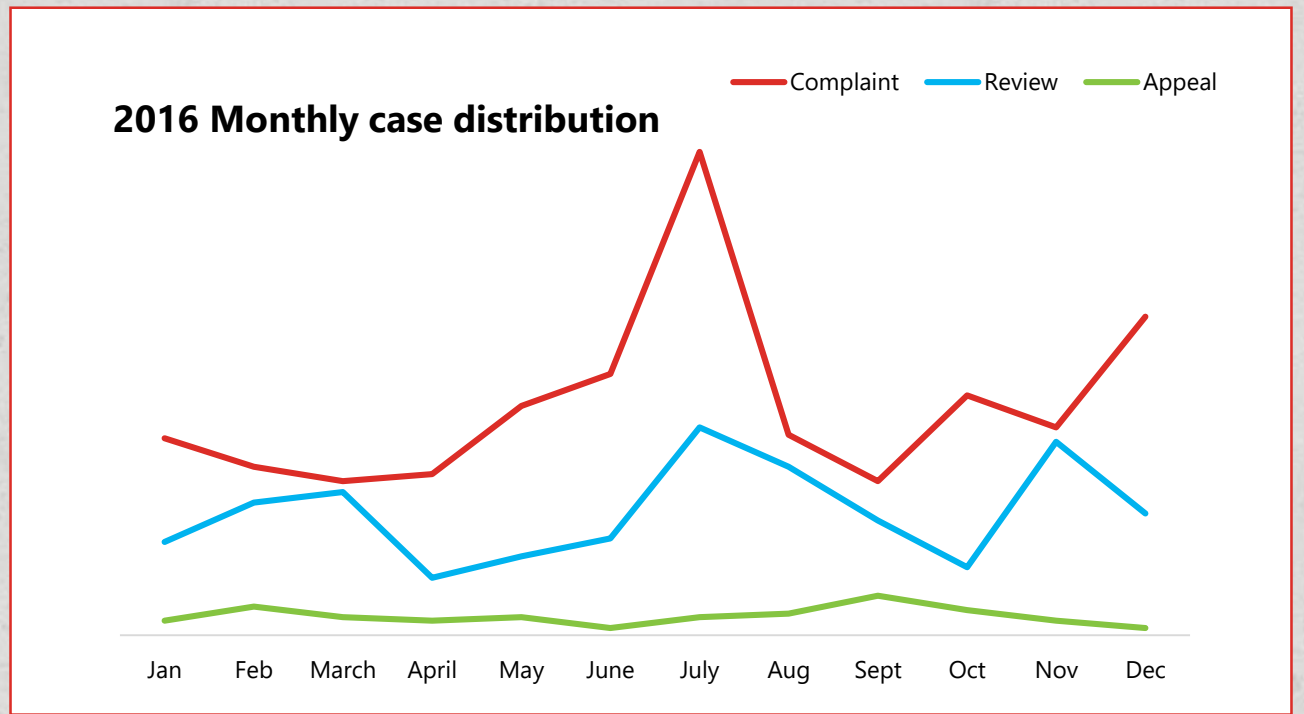
- Analyse and monitor complaint data regularly and explore in a focussed manner
- Report on complaint data annually to show 'the big picture'.





When?

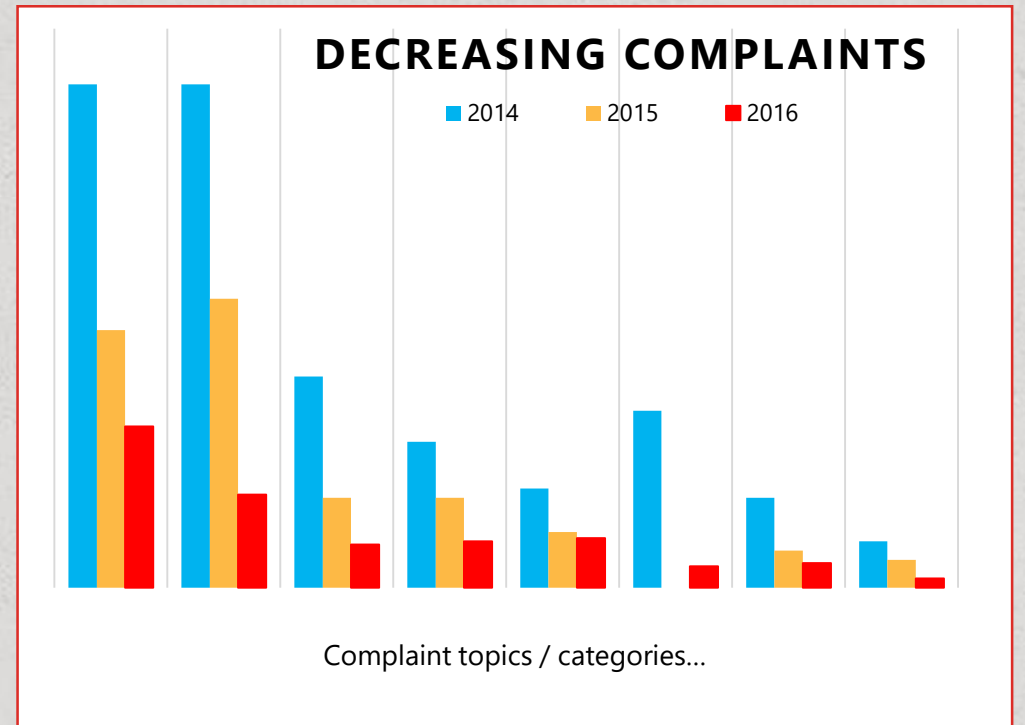
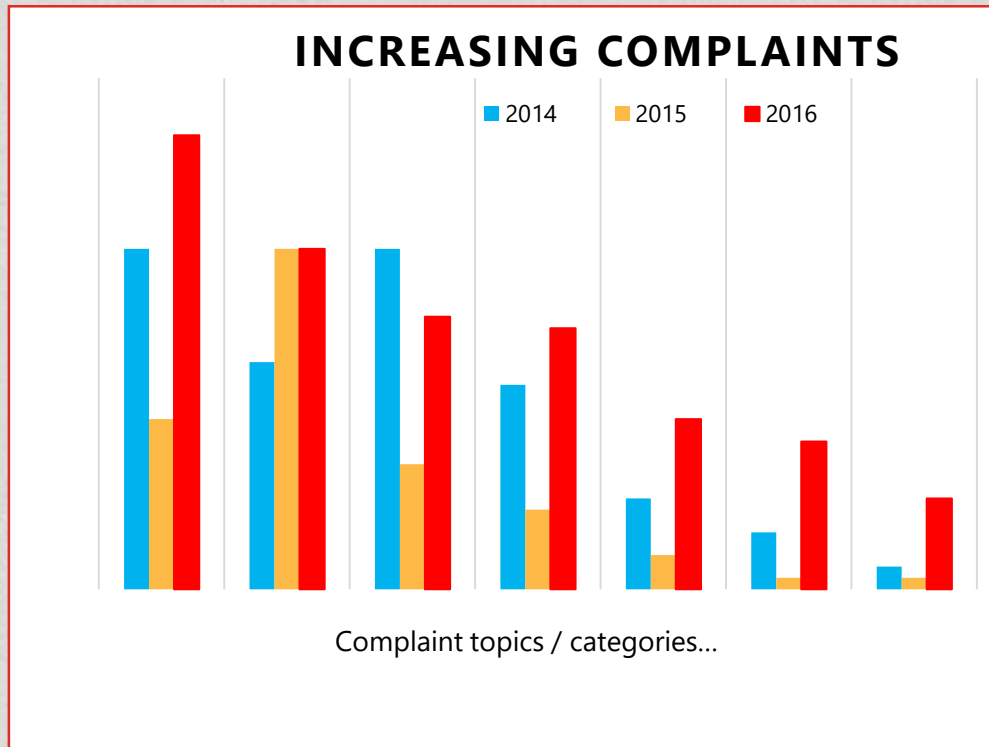
- Prepared for busy periods
- Note irregularities





What?

- Trends for improvements and concerns

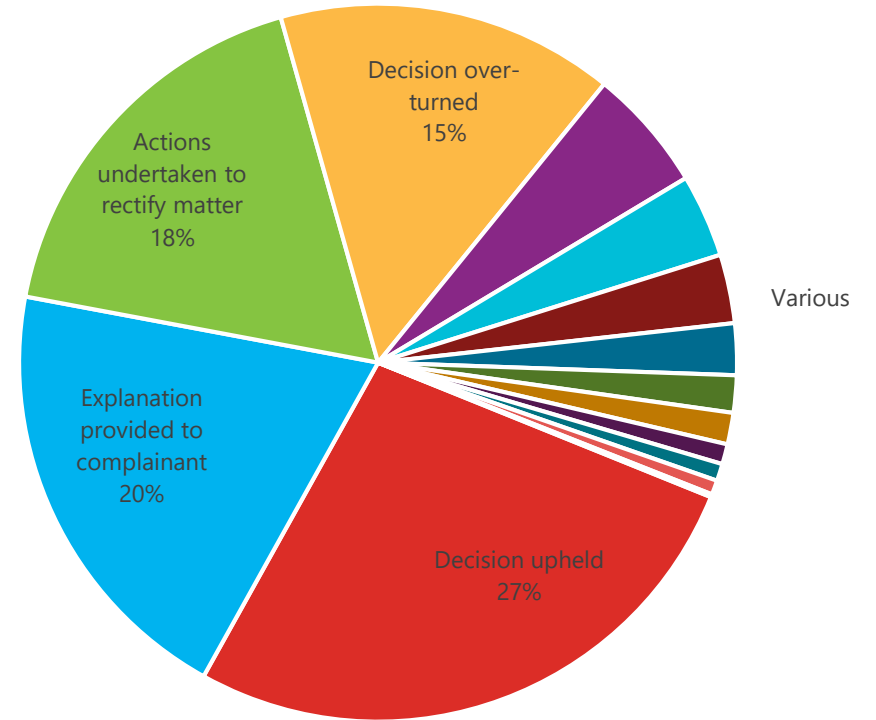




How?

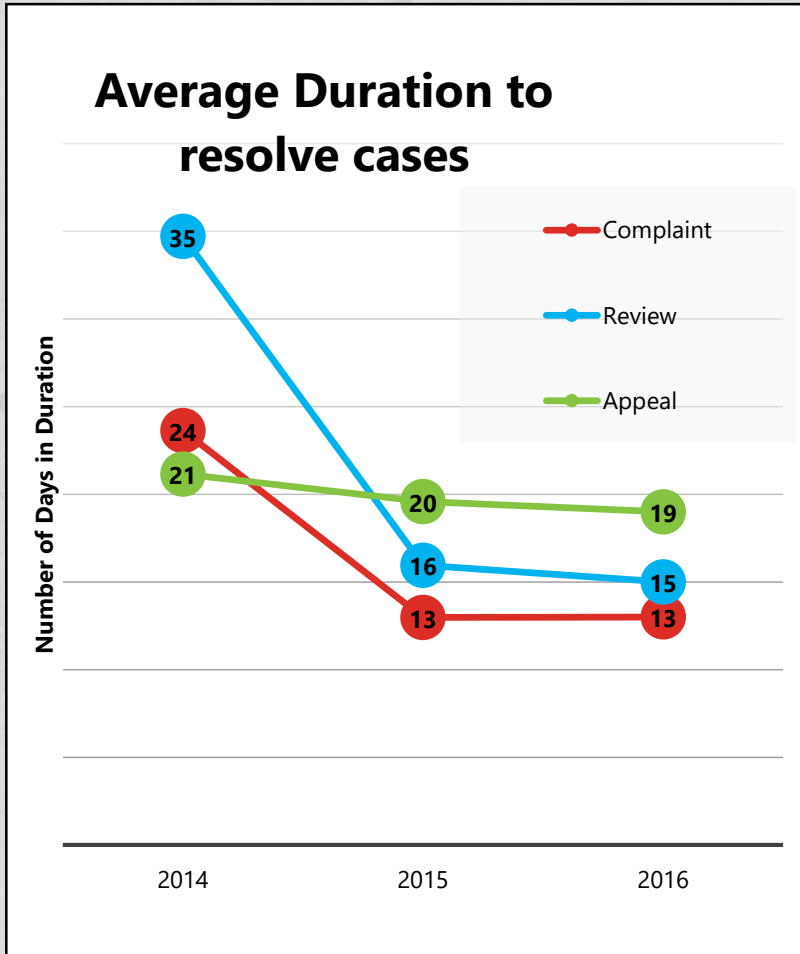
- How did it get resolved?
- It's important to know how we are tracking for Decisions Upheld Vs Decisions Overturned

COMPLAINT OUTCOMES





How long?



- The time taken to resolve a case has always been very important.
- In 2014 when data started being tracked, average durations were higher than desired
- Displaying data on the average number of days gained the attention of senior management.

Ability to make observations, not just reel off figures

“ It is important to note that not all complaints were substantiated – of the ‘#’ complaints received on this topic, ‘#’ complaints were not upheld or later retracted. The relevant academic department consider and resolve these cases, providing opportunity for reflection and improvements where required. ”

“ In 2016 ‘#’% of all re-assessment requests resulted in a ‘**decision over-turned**’ or ‘**decision amended**’, meaning that a re-assessment was granted and a result was amended.

This has **increased** from ‘#’% in 2015.

This may indicate an opportunity to enhance assessment practices ”

Oversight and Accountability

ACCOUNTABILITY
BREEDS
RESPONSE-ABILITY.

~STEVEN COVEY

Providing answers lead to responsive action

- WHAT'S **TRENDING** ?
 - *How many complaints do we have on that topic at the moment?*
- HOW ARE WE **TRACKING** ?
 - *How are we performing against this time last year?*
- GAPS IN **TRAINING** ?
 - *What do we need to do to improve?*

Oversight leads to accountability

- Monthly reports to Senior management – including the Vice Chancellor
 - These reports include due dates and accountable staff per complaint
- Annual complaints report circulated and presented at
 - Academic Senate
 - Executive Group
 - High risk complaints to Audit and Risk Committee
- Accountability encourages action
 - Example: One department, upon examining the time it took for them to resolve complaints, issued an internal protocol that complaints must be resolved in 10 working days, rather than the 21 working days.

Key insights

- Need buy-in from senior management
- Report to the appropriate bodies in your institution
- Sell what you do. Tell them it matters
- Ombudsman oversight is beneficial

Re-cap

**Welcome
complaints**

**Embed
structure**

**Data
Data
Data**

**Oversight
and
accountability**

Questions?

