



Chapter 2

Child Support Agency

2.1 Levels of complaints

Complaints received by the Child Support Agency

The Child Support Agency's caseload on 31 March 2001 was 1,048,920, an increase of 1.8 per cent from last year. It is pleasing to note that the number of written complaints the CSA received during the year reduced by 6 per cent from 21,015 to 19,704. These figures do not include all complaints made by telephone. The Agency's drive to conduct as much business as possible by telephone highlights the need to record these complaints, and the Agency is developing a system for counting them.

Complaints received by the Independent Case Examiner

Although complaints received by the CSA have reduced, the office of the Independent Case Examiner has seen a significant increase of 21 per cent in the cases received from 1,226 last year to 1,488 this year.

Cases we accepted

A more representative measure is however, the number of complaints we were able to accept. This year we accepted 765 of the complaints we received, which was an increase of 31 per cent from the 584 we accepted last year. The complaints accepted represents 0.07 per cent of the Agency's caseload. Much of this increase, which occurred towards the end of the year, is a result of the Agency's improved performance in signposting our service. Eighteen of the cases accepted were received from previous clients who continued to experience difficulties and wished to make a new complaint about the CSA. There are lessons to be learnt from repeat complaints, and we therefore intend to undertake a more detailed analysis during 2001/02.

Cases we could not accept

■ Cases which were not appropriate to this office

This year we have been unable to investigate 122 (8 per cent) cases because they were outside the remit of this office, as they were complaints about legislation or policy. Last year the number of cases was 96 (7 per cent). The Independent Case Examiner has recently undertaken to capture the details of such complaints and to provide senior Department of Social Security policy managers with an assessment of the key issues being raised.

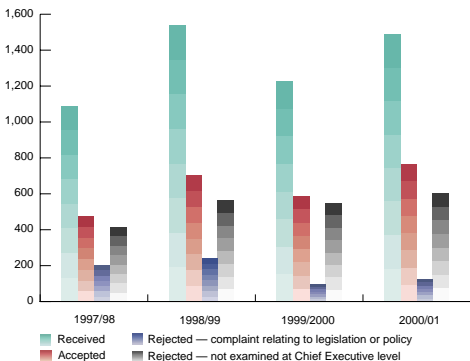
■ Cases where the internal complaints process was not exhausted

Six hundred and one such cases were rejected this year, an increase of 55 cases from last year. Prior to the last annual report, clients had complained that they were sometimes unable to secure the final response from or on behalf of the Chief Executive and were being prevented from accessing the services of ICE. We said that we would introduce arrangements to overcome this problem. Where we are unable to accept a case because the client has not exhausted the Agency's complaints process, we pass the details to the Agency asking that the matter be addressed. We now advise the client that if they do not receive a final response within six weeks of our letter, and they still wish to pursue the complaint, we will accept it without further reference to the Agency. There are some concerns that some Business Units are not responding to this final opportunity to resolve the issues and to improve customer confidence, allowing the six weeks to pass until ICE accepts the complaint. We have begun to monitor the situation to assess the scale and location of the problem.

It is a concern that so many clients (40 per cent of cases received) continue to approach the Independent Case Examiner before they have exhausted the Agency's internal complaint process. It suggests that customers are confused about how to pursue a complaint. Better explanations at an early stage and signposting to the next stage would certainly help to alleviate this problem.

Complaints received, accepted and rejected by ICE

The following table shows the total number of complaints received and accepted and also complaints rejected by this office. It also describes the position compared with previous years. (For further details see Table 1 at Annex A.)



Who complains

The following table shows the proportions of cases reaching our office from non-resident parents and parents with care. In the early years of this service fewer parents with care complained. Since each Child Support Agency case has two parents involved, the Independent Case Examiner would expect to receive a more even distribution of complaints and notes that year on year this is happening.

Non-Resident Parents			Parents With Care		
	1999/00	2000/01		1999/2000	2000/01
Male	56%	53%	Male	2%	2%
Female	3%	3%	Female	39%	42%
Total	59%	56%	Total	41%	44%

Child Support Agency caseload v complaints accepted by ICE

It is interesting to note the proportion of cases accepted from each Business Unit, compared with their share of the Agency's workload. (For further details see Table 2a at Appendix A.) The substantial proportion of complaints received about the Eastern Business Unit may reflect the fact that they have made the greatest strides in reducing outstanding work arrears in the Agency.

