

Independent Case Examiner for the Child Support Agency

Annual Report
2003/04

Headline Summary

Judging the issues by
not taking sides



"The service worked 100% for me and I would not hesitate to recommend or use the service again if I needed to".

Extract from customer satisfaction survey

The Independent Case Examiner's Office: We provide a free, impartial complaint review and resolution service to customers of the Child Support Agency. Our service is independent of the Agency. It is available to those customers who are dissatisfied with the Agency's response to their complaint or the redress provided.

Complaints Process: When someone complains to the Independent Case Examiner, we try to resolve matters as quickly as possible by helping the complainant and the Agency reach an agreement. If this cannot be achieved, an investigation will be undertaken. This may lead us to make recommendations to the Child Support Agency about putting matters right. The Independent Case Examiner may also recommend changes to Agency systems and procedures which will result in improvements to their customer service. In this way complaint review can have a positive impact on the experience of Agency customers in the future.

Complaint referrals: During the 2003/2004 business year we received 2,150 complaint referrals, 924 of which were accepted for investigation. A significant increase was noted in the last quarter of the year, during which we received 671 referrals. This compares with 1,419 and 702 respectively in the previous year and represents an increase in complaint referrals of approximately 52%. This figures needs to be set against an Agency caseload of 1,203,405.

Of the 924 cases we accepted for investigation, 255 related to issues associated with Child Support Reforms or the new Child Support Agency computer system.

Total cases cleared: The table below shows the number of cases cleared during the reporting year.

Total Cases Cleared	2002/2003	2003/2004
Not accepted for action	717	1226
Resolution reports	409	370
Investigation reports	390	436
Withdrawn	81	72
Total cleared	1,597	2,104
Outstanding at year end	441	496

Target for clearing cases: We aim to clear cases within an average of 34 weeks. In the 2002/2003, business year, cases took an average of 39.37 weeks to clear. We are pleased to report that our average clearance time for 2003/2004 reduced to 31.87 weeks.

Elements of complaint: Most complaints comprise a number of allegations of maladministration, which often relate to different issues or events. To reflect this, investigation reports present our findings in respect of each element of the client's complaint. This gives a more informative view of how the Agency dealt with the different issues.

"I was out of my mind with nowhere to turn, it was a relief for someone to listen and agree with me. Very satisfied."

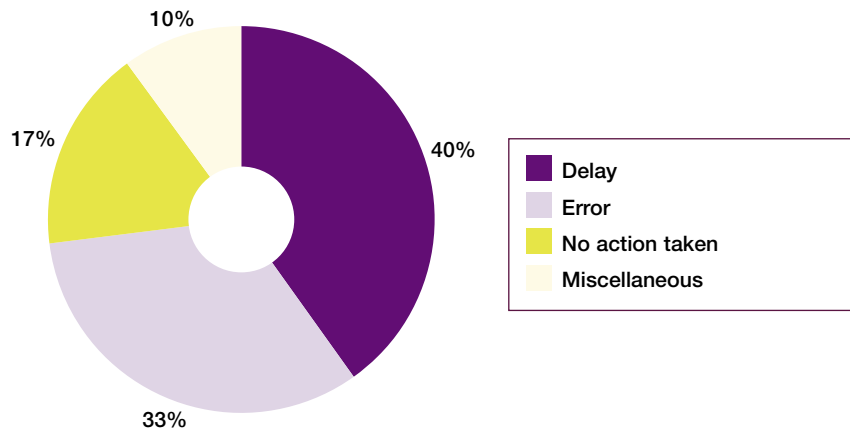
Extract from customer satisfaction survey

During the reporting year, the 806 cases we cleared by resolution and investigation contained 1,939 elements of complaint. 678 of these were resolved and 15 were outside the jurisdiction of this office.

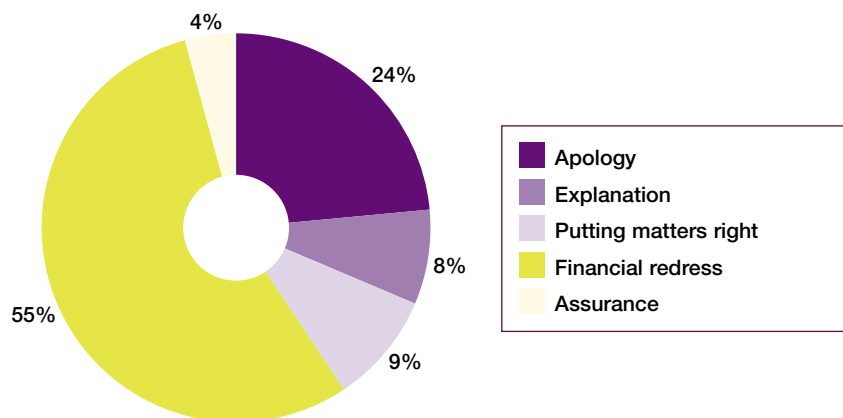
Findings: The Independent Case Examiner will not uphold a complaint, if at the time of acceptance the Child Support Agency has done all that it can to resolve it. The table below shows the outcome of our investigations.

Outcome of Investigation	2002/2003	2003/2004
Upheld	691 (57%)	788 (63%)
Not upheld	525 (43%)	458 (37%)

Subject of complaint: The areas of complaint recorded in this reporting year are outlined below.



Redress: We aim to secure redress for people, if the standard of service they have received from the Agency fell below that which they were entitled to receive. We do this by making recommendations to the Agency. These fall into 5 main categories: apology, assurance, explanation, putting matters right and financial redress. During the reporting year we made 1,791 recommendations. Details of the range and type of recommendations are outlined below.



"The case was handled in a caring and professional way. I was informed of progress throughout. The level of service was excellent".

Extract from customer satisfaction survey

Financial redress: Financial redress is not the only answer when things go wrong. Prompt recognition and rectification of service failures on the part of the Agency can prevent the need for it to pay financial redress later down the line. That said, as in previous years, following their complaint to the Independent Case Examiner, clients received significant amounts of financial redress. These included:

- Consolatory payments totaling £44,274;
- Financial loss payments totaling £198,038;
- Collection of maintenance arrears amounting to £48,233 was deferred or suspended;
- Advance payments totaling £108,410;
- Refunds of maintenance totaling £16,795;
- Interest totaling £18,349 to reflect loss of the use of monies (in respect of advance payments and refunds);
- Other - £36,272.

Key issues: This years Annual Report highlights that a number of the complaint referrals related to case issues arising from the Child Support Reforms and the Agency's new information technology system. The report also considers Agency progress on enforcement. Finally, we comment on the Agency's response to recommendations made by the Independent Case Examiner.

Case examples: The Report provides anonymised examples of cases, which have been dealt with by the Independent Case Examiner's office during the reporting year.

Copies of the Independent Case Examiner's Annual Report can be obtained from:

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Copies can also be obtained from our website at **www.ind-case-exam.org.uk**
This report is also available on request in Braille or Audio version.

