

INDEPENDENT CASE EXAMINER
For the Department for Work and Pensions

ANNUAL REPORT
1 APRIL 2007 – 31 MARCH 2008

Judging the issues without taking sides

The Independent Case Examiner's Office

Our Mission

Judging the issues without taking sides

Our Business Purpose

We have two primary business objectives: to act as an independent referee if customers of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) feel that the Department or one of its Agencies has not treated them fairly or has not dealt with complaints in a satisfactory manner; and to support the Department in improving the service it delivers by providing constructive criticism and meaningful recommendations.

Our Aim

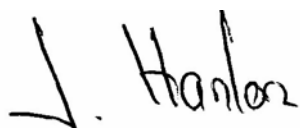
To provide a free, effective and impartial complaints review and resolution service for DWP customers that makes a difference to the way in which the Department discharges its public responsibilities.

Our Vision

To be a first rate service provided by professional staff.

1. Independent Case Examiner's foreword

- 1.1. I am pleased to present my first Annual Report as Independent Case Examiner (ICE) for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This report describes the work of the ICE Office in the year ending 31 March 2008, and focuses on our experience of the DWP businesses'/agencies' approach to complaint resolution.
- 1.2. I took over as ICE in April 2007, following the extension of the ICE remit to cover all customer facing DWP businesses. This seemed to me to endorse the real difference made by ICE both to complainants, in the extremely positive outcomes achieved for individuals, and to the CSA by helping it to improve the service it offers to its customers. It was also confirmation of the success of the broader ICE prototype which had been running during 2006/07.
- 1.3. The widened remit has been a success. DWP customers who previously would either have complained through their Member of Parliament to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) or who would have given up even though they remained dissatisfied, have had their concerns addressed and had the reassurance that the impartial ICE service can bring. DWP businesses have produced good results by their willingness to attempt to promote resolution of complaints at the earliest opportunity, and to take on board feedback and proposals from this office, with a view to improving their approach to resolving complaints.
- 1.4. However, this year has also been extremely challenging in the face of a higher than expected intake of CSA cases in the first part of the year and the problems associated with that, detailed below.
- 1.5. The service provided by CSA to this office in terms of meeting its Service Level Agreements has not been as good as we would have wished, though matters have improved as the year progressed. The Agency has also taken steps to focus on enforcement of child maintenance arrears, and getting money to children at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.6. Despite the problems faced, the ICE office has been able to promote resolution of complaints at the earliest opportunity, clearing nearly four out of every five cases (78.7% of complaints) by brokering agreement between parties and has maintained a high standard of service to complainants and to the Department.



John Hanlon

Independent Case Examiner

18 July 2008

2. Executive Summary

Summary of key messages 2007/08

- DWP businesses have produced good results over the course of 2007 by their willingness to attempt to promote resolution of complaints at the earliest opportunity, and to take on board ICE feedback and proposals.
- The first six months of 2007 were particularly challenging as CSA intake far exceeded what had been expected, largely as a result of changes to complaint management within CSA. This had a negative impact on the CSA's ability to implement agreed resolution actions and recommendations. However, the situation has improved over the latter half of the year as the CSA has re-deployed staff to work on ICE cases and has taken steps to focus on enforcement of child maintenance arrears, and getting money to children at the earliest opportunity.
- In October 2007, it became necessary to introduce an "Exit" arrangement, which allowed ICE to disengage from an unacceptably high number of cases where the CSA had not implemented post-investigation ICE resolutions or recommendations within agreed timescales. Between October 2007 and February 2008, it was necessary to "Exit" 51 cases. In 47 of these, recommendations have subsequently been satisfactorily implemented, but disappointingly 4 remain outstanding. After discussions with senior CSA management, immediate action was taken to ensure that no further "Exits" would be required from March 2008.

Areas for improvement 2008/09

- Overall, good progress has been made in 2007/08. I am looking forward to 2008/09, and there are a number of areas where I would hope to see further improvements, as detailed below:
- There has been an increase in cases being referred to ICE by third party profit making organisations. I will be discussing with the businesses what more can be done to make it clear to complainants that ICE is a free, independent service that can be easily accessed without the need to involve these profit making third parties.
- Complainants continue to come to us too early, before the businesses have fully engaged with the complaint through their internal processes. I will be monitoring the impact of actions being taken by the businesses to address this issue.
- My office will continue to work with the businesses to help them improve their ability to meet the Service Level Agreement, particularly in respect of timely response to ICE investigations, resolution actions, and systemic recommendations.

Summary of Business Performance		
Business Performance	Performance 2006/07	Performance 2007/08
Received	3974	5065*
Accepted	1805	2036
Fails	2169	3029*
Total case clearances (of which):	1710	1843
Resolved	1155	1302
Investigated	368	352
Withdrawn	187	189

*55 cases were received with insufficient information to identify which business they related to, and as such subsequently failed our gateway

3. DWP Businesses (except CSA)

- 3.1 In the latter part of the year, ICE intake from businesses other than CSA has increased significantly. This was to be expected as awareness of the ICE service was raised among the broader DWP customer base. The majority of the increase can be attributed to complaints about Jobcentre Plus, again unsurprising since it is the largest of the Department's agencies.
- 3.2 Our experiences at the end of this reporting year have by and large reinforced and consolidated our expectations during the first six months, and the key findings/messages remain on the whole the same. The majority of cases we see are resolved, which demonstrates the businesses' willingness to co-operate with the ICE office, though it might also indicate that there is more that could be done by those businesses to explore all avenues for resolution and prevent complaints from having to progress to ICE. Of those complaints which we are not able to resolve, most are not upheld, indicating that, in those cases, businesses have been pro-active at putting things right in-house. As might be expected, most of the complaints we examine - particularly, though not exclusively, those which cannot be resolved - are complex.
- 3.3 Businesses are generally very receptive to feedback and I remain impressed by their enthusiasm and preparedness to implement changes to their working practices where they agree that this would lead to improvement. I have raised several systemic issues with various businesses which they have taken on board. In doing so, they have generally provided information in a timely manner, explaining the action they are prepared to take to improve the service they offer to their customers. It is rewarding to hear that most of the businesses find feedback from ICE extremely useful, and that it has helped them to become more focused in their approach to examining complaints.
- 3.4 I have asked businesses to review the relevant information in literature and on websites, to ensure that their customers are made aware of the ICE service but also that the information fully explains to complainants that they should have

- 3.5 As the year has progressed and numbers of cases accepted from Jobcentre Plus have increased, I am concerned that the Agency has increasingly struggled to meet Service Level Agreement (SLA) commitments. As a result, and following discussion with other businesses, one SLA deadline has so far been extended but achievement of SLA timescales may become more problematic for Jobcentre Plus and others in the coming year, particularly where Focal Point (FP) resource is tight.

4. Child Support Agency

- 4.1 Although during the first half of the reporting period CSA casework increased dramatically, I am mindful that this needs to be put into perspective: ICE deals with a small percentage of the Agency's live load, and often sees the more problematic cases. Despite the problems we see, we are aware that the Agency is getting more money for children than ever before and getting better at enforcement.
- 4.2 Nevertheless, from our perspective, and as previously highlighted, it has been an extremely challenging twelve months in dealing with the CSA, and the ICE office has had to make significant changes to its processes as a result of the problems we have experienced with the Agency.

"Bouncebacks"

- 4.3 For several years ICE has had an arrangement with CSA whereby it accepted referrals from complainants who were unable to secure a final response from or on behalf of the Chief Executive within a specified period. This was deemed to have occurred in situations where the initial referral to ICE revealed that the CSA had not offered a final response, and at a point 8 weeks later the CSA had still not offered a final response. During the previous reporting year, such cases were the exception with only 50 being accepted during the whole of the 2006/07 business year. In contrast, during the first six months of the 2007/08 year ICE accepted 387 such referrals.
- 4.4 Following discussions with ICE Stewards it was recognised that the high number of premature referrals to ICE was undermining the Agency's complaints resolution processes and the "bounceback" arrangement had become unsustainable in CSA cases. It was agreed that, for an indefinite period, but subject to review, ICE would not accept complaints about CSA until the complainant had gone through the Agency's internal complaints tiers and the Agency had offered a final response to the issues of concern.
- 4.5 The Department does, however, grant me discretion to take on complaints which do not meet that criterion, where, in my judgement, the objective features of the case merit my doing so. Since I am concerned that the general restriction on "bounceback" cases might become a barrier that denies parents access to

- 4.6 I am concerned that the suspension of the “bounceback” arrangements may be one of the factors that has led to more complainants approaching their MPs. There has been a 17.9% increase in the number of MPs who refer cases in respect of CSA to ICE, with 352 referrals received for the 2006/07 reporting year, increasing to 415 for the 2007/08 period.
- 4.7 CSA senior management is aware of my concerns and is keen to ensure that failed ICE gateways are tackled effectively. It has therefore established dedicated teams to review complaints that fail the ICE gateway where the Agency has not offered a final response. Despite this, it is evident that some complainants who approach the ICE Office are still having trouble in obtaining responses from the Agency, with some waiting since October 2007 for a response.

Co-operation with ICE

- 4.8 The service that ICE is able to offer complainants is dependent upon the co-operation of the DWP businesses that are the subject of the complaints. Unless the businesses respond to enquires, requests for information and draft closure reports, ICE cannot complete its examination of complaints.
- 4.9 CSA was, for the most part, adhering to SLA deadlines until the autumn of 2006. Over the past eighteen months however CSA has found it increasingly difficult to adhere to the SLA, and delays in all areas of engagement have had a negative effect upon the service ICE is able to offer complainants.
- 4.10 ICE managers and I raised this problem with every tier of CSA management. The ICE Office has expended considerable resources during the year in pursuing co-operation, escalating requests, responding to frustrated complainants and completing nugatory work.
- 4.11 Under the Department’s standing arrangements a consolatory payment can be made as part of the redress for the impact of maladministration on the lives of its customers. In deciding how much to pay, account is taken of the maladministration identified and whether the handling of the complaint resolved matters or whether poor complaint handling added to the impact on the customer. Following discussion with the Agency, and in view of the number of cases reflecting considerable delay, it was agreed that we would seek payments for poor complaint handling (referred to as botheration payments) in appropriate situations. We are therefore recommending that the Agency award a botheration payment where there has been a significant service failure which has impacted on our progression of a case, and, in closed cases where the Agency has failed to implement our recommendations.

4.12 I am pleased to be able to report that CSA has made some positive changes. In particular, it has changed arrangements for handling clerical complaints and has applied substantial resources to address backlogs. Good relations have been forged between ICE and CSA staff, who are working together to achieve satisfactory outcomes for complainants. We have also continued to build on the good working relationship we have with senior Agency managers, with a view to maintaining continuous improvement. We welcome the constructive response received from those managers, especially their introduction of organisational change to improve Agency complaint resolution and their ongoing engagement with ICE managers in relation to specific cases and circumstances that are causing concern.

Handing back responsibility to CSA at the end of ICE investigations

4.13 ICE closure reports are issued to the complainant detailing the actions that CSA has agreed to undertake and the timescales involved. In a number of cases during 2007/08 the CSA failed to honour agreements within required timescales and ICE staff engaged in extensive communications to try to secure compliance with the resolutions or recommendations. The Agency has since taken positive steps to recover from this position.

4.14 At the point ICE issues a closure report its work is effectively done. It has identified what needs to happen to put the case back on track and the CSA has agreed to its proposals. CSA's delay in progressing some of the agreed proposals during the reporting year gave rise to a situation in which ICE staff spent much longer than envisaged in following up outstanding actions. That in turn presented ICE with a conundrum: if we stayed engaged for too long post-investigation, albeit with the best of intentions, was there a risk that we could unreasonably raise complainants' expectations of success and potentially inhibit their progressing complaints to the Parliamentary Ombudsman? Ultimately, we concluded that we were at real risk of maladministering cases in that way.

4.15 As a result, following discussions with operational managers in ICE, with DWP and with PHSO, I introduced "Exit" arrangements whereby, if CSA has failed to implement agreed resolution actions or recommendations within 6 weeks of the date the final action was due to be completed, I will advise the complainant that I am withdrawing from the case. In every such case I will advise the complainant of their right to approach PHSO, via their MP.

4.16 This was a significant departure from the established practice and has considerable implications for CSA and for the Department. I am effectively saying to complainants that I am unable to secure the redress that is appropriate in their case.

4.17 Since these arrangements were introduced on 1 October 2007, to the end of February 2008, we had to exit from 51 cases. In each of these cases we have had to remind our complainants of their right to approach PHSO. The Agency has also paid every one of these complainants a 'botheration' payment to reflect the undue delay in implementing the recommendations I have made.

4.18 I am pleased to say that discussions with Senior Agency Managers about implementation of outstanding actions resulted in the Agency agreeing to take

- 4.19 Furthermore, I am also pleased to acknowledge that of the 51 cases we exited from, the Agency has subsequently implemented the outstanding resolutions or recommendations in 47. Disappointingly, the Agency has been unable to carry out the required action in four cases despite the very considerable time lapse (some of the outstanding actions dated back to August 2006).

5. Common Issues

During the course of this year, a couple of matters have come to my attention with relevance to more than one of the businesses with which I deal:

Third Party Interventions

- 5.1 The Department for Work and Pensions made the decision to set up the ICE office for a number of reasons, including its desire to improve the service it offers to its customers and to ensure that those who are unhappy with the service it provides, or with the way in which it has dealt with their complaints, are provided with a free and impartial investigation of the issues they raise and with an independent assessment of appropriate redress. Because ICE provides a free complaint resolution service, and because that service is designed to be readily accessible to all, there should very rarely be any need for complainants to pay third parties to represent them.
- 5.2 I am seeing an increasing number of cases which have been referred to ICE by third party profit making organisations, who are acting on behalf of the complainant. In my opinion, and from the cases I have seen, these organisations too often appear to be acting merely as a “post box” between the complainant and ICE, and a potentially very expensive “post box” at that. I am concerned at how such third parties are paid. In some instances, the fees required by these organisations might only be paid from compensatory or consolatory payments intended for the benefit of the complainant or, worse, from advance payments of child maintenance awarded as a result of our involvement, when these payments should be directed for the benefit of the qualifying children concerned. It seems to me that in respect of CSA cases, either money due for maintenance of children is being utilised in an unintended manner, or, where there is no maladministration found, complainants are incurring an unnecessary expense.
- 5.3 This highlights to me that we need to do more to ensure that complainants are fully aware of the service ICE provides, and particularly that it is a free service. It is important that our services should be accessible to *all* complainants. In my opinion there should rarely be a reason for a complainant to instruct a fee paying organisation to represent them, until they have exhausted both the services of the ICE office and, if necessary, PHSO.
- 5.4 In view of this I would wish the businesses to explore how they might better promote ICE as a free, independent service available to sort out any complaints

Early Approaches to ICE

- 5.5 In the first six months of the reporting year, the CSA work, which had been expected to continue at a level similar to the previous year, saw a dramatic increase: 41% in cases received and 43% in the number of cases accepted for examination. Much of that rise can be ascribed to a dramatic upturn in the number coming to ICE precipitately before the customer had received a final response from the Agency. The work received from other businesses remained in line with forecasts for the first six months, but increased in the second half of the year by a very significant 84%. To some extent, particularly in the case of Jobcentre Plus, that too was ascribable to premature approaches from DWP customers.
- 5.6 As a result of this unexpected rise, partly to ensure that ICE could concentrate on those cases which remained unresolved after the Agency had been given a reasonable opportunity to do so and partly to ensure that ICE could continue to operate within its resource allocation, the Department decided in September 2007 to modify the arrangements between CSA and ICE. This modification was planned to allow ICE to give focussed attention to those cases in most need of its assistance. ICE temporarily ceased routinely to accept those CSA complaints which had not been fully addressed by that Agency ("bounceback" cases, referred to in section 4 above).
- 5.7 The same issue is emerging in relation to other businesses, particularly Jobcentre Plus: complainants are regularly coming to us too early before the business concerned has been given the opportunity to put matters right. As a result of this, and in order to avoid reaching a similar situation as with CSA, in February this year it was decided in agreement with businesses that the arrangements in respect of the non CSA work would also be modified to ensure that complainants complied with the requirement to engage fully with the relevant business before approaching ICE. This is unlikely to have an impact until the next reporting year.

6. Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) Referrals to ICE

- 6.1 PHSO will not usually investigate a complaint if the complainant has not exhausted the Department's internal processes, including the service offered by the independent tier. PHSO's office refers complaints to ICE if the complainant has not sought our input, unless it is deemed there are any exceptional reasons why it should take on the complaint sooner. If there are no such reasons it will refer the complaint back either to the relevant Agency, or, where that stage of the complaints process has been completed, to ICE, for us to deal with.
- 6.2 During this reporting period ICE received 172 direct referrals from PHSO: 137 CSA complaints and 35 relating to other DWP businesses.

- 6.3 During the period, we cleared 127 cases referred from PHSO: 107 CSA and 20 others. I am greatly impressed that ICE staff were able to resolve 67% of these complaints to the complainant's satisfaction. I consider it a major achievement that staff are managing to achieve resolution of such a significant proportion of these cases, given the level of disillusionment and mistrust which may often build up by the time a complainant seeks the intervention of the Ombudsman. It demonstrates that mediated agreement can still be reached even when there are significant challenges to be faced.

PHSO Principles of Good Administration and Principles for Remedy

- 6.4 In March 2007, PHSO published The Principles of Good Administration and in October 2007, The Principles for Remedy.
- 6.5 An audit of ICE processes was carried out by ICE internal auditors in March 2008 to provide assurance to the Independent Case Examiner and senior managers that ICE business practices reflect the Principles. The audit team were also asked to identify areas of potential improvement.
- 6.6 The Principles are a broad statement of what the Ombudsman believes public bodies within its jurisdiction should be doing to deliver good administration and customer service. The internal audit established that the Principles approach is being deployed throughout the ICE Office. There is strong evidence that the Office is following the Principles in each area. The evidence demonstrates that the Office is committed to a learn, review and improve approach, and that the Principles of Good Administration and for Remedy are embedded in its culture.

7. ICE standards of service

- 7.1 It has been a rewarding year for the ICE office, in which it has risen to the challenges it has faced and continued to deliver a creditable service to complainants despite rising workloads.
- 7.2 When we acknowledge receipt of a complaint referral, we send the complainant a copy of our leaflet "Our Service and Standards". The leaflet explains how we deal with complaints and includes information about how long it should take us to do so. This year's performance, despite the challenge posed by the very significant delays experienced in relation to CSA cases and explained in section 4 above, has remained well within those published timescales. ICE throughput rate for the reporting year in respect of CSA caseload is 21.94 weeks, which is still considerably ahead of our 34 week published target. This compares to 18.86 weeks for the 2006/07 reporting period.

7.3 Our level of service for this reporting year and the last is detailed below:

Target	Performance 2006/07	Performance 2007/08
Acknowledge complaints within 2 working days	99.8%	99.5%
Respond to correspondence within 10 working days	99.4%	98.9%
Decide within 10 working days whether we can accept a complaint for consideration	99.6%	97.0%
Remind complainants at case closure of their right to approach the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman	100.0%	100.0%
Clear cases accepted for action, within 34 weeks	18.87 wks	21.21 wks

8. The ICE Office

- 8.1 I am very grateful to the ICE Office for the support given to me during my first year as ICE. Despite the challenges we have encountered, staff have remained highly motivated and committed to providing a first rate service to complainants. I am particularly impressed by their willingness to embrace the changes to our processes that I have initiated.
- 8.2 I am impressed at the staff's ability to resolve such a high percentage of our complaints at the earliest opportunity. I also want to pay credit to staff for the knowledge they have built up in respect of all the DWP businesses and agencies whose complaints we examine. It is pleasing to observe that our people are fully committed to forging excellent working relationships with the agencies/businesses we engage with, in order to achieve the best possible outcome for complainants. During the year, eleven people from the ICE office have undertaken a new mediation course with a professional accreditation. The management team intends to offer this training to all new staff and to those others who might benefit from it.
- 8.3 I am delighted that the Office has achieved Charter Mark re-accreditation and that it has achieved the British Standards Institute (BSI) accreditation for its internal complaints processes. Both of those indicate the very high level of service the staff here provides to members of the public. I am also pleased that the Office, which has long recognised the value of its staff and has held Investors in People (IiP) accreditation since 1999, has this year been successful in gaining accreditation against the much higher standard of IiP Profile.
- 8.4 There have recently been some major changes to the senior management team at ICE, with the retirement of Phil Latus, the Case Director, and Elspeth Cooper, the Operations Director. Both have played an integral part in the success and positive culture of the ICE office. I would like to offer my personal thanks to them for their commitment and efforts on behalf of complainants. I would also like to welcome the appointment of Carol Farrell to her new role as Head of the ICE Office and the confirmation of Margaret Fowler in hers as Operations Manager. I look forward to a productive working relationship with them both.

8.5 The Office is committed to providing a first rate service. I am pleased to report that people who use the ICE service have expressed high levels of satisfaction, and have told us about the difference our service has made to their lives, as the following quotes demonstrate:

“Excellent staff and service. I could not have coped without this service behind me. Thanks so much to everyone. I’m really very grateful!”

“I am very happy with the friendly, helpful and courteous manner in which I was treated, it lifted a huge strain off me.”

INDEPENDENT CASE EXAMINER

For the Department for Work and Pensions

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SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Judging the issues without taking sides

Supporting Evidence part 1: Jobcentre Plus Business Performance

1. Casework Statistics

The data and figures that follow are based on casework carried out in the twelve month period between 1 April 2007 and 31 March 2008.

2. Complaints Received

2.1 Complaints received, accepted and failed during the period are outlined below:

	Received	Accepted	Failed
Complaints Received	895	239	656

2.2 The number of complaints received from Jobcentre Plus has increased significantly from 301 received and 79 accepted in the first six months of the reporting period to 594 received and 160 accepted in the latter six months. The main reason for the increase appears to be that Jobcentre Plus customers are now more aware of the existence of ICE and the service we provide.

2.3 The number of complaints failing our gateway is still extremely high, with 222 fails for the initial six month period, and 434 for the latter. For the full reporting period this represents 73% of the cases received. The reason for this appears to be that Jobcentre Plus complainants are coming to ICE too soon, without having exhausted Jobcentre Plus complaint procedures first. This issue has been raised at the ICE Stewardship Group meetings. Action has since been taken by Jobcentre Plus to write to its districts raising awareness that complainants should not be directed to ICE until they have received a response from or on behalf of the Chief Executive. Changes have also been made to the ICE website to try to deter premature referrals.

2.4 Because of the problems encountered with CSA “bouncebacks” and also to ensure consistency throughout all the businesses we deal with, a decision was made in February 2008 to tighten the “bounceback” arrangements to ensure that complainants are actively discouraged from attempting to bypass business internal arrangements. It is too soon to see any changes in the number of cases we accept. However, it seems likely that changes to this arrangement should have an impact in the next reporting period.

3. Case clearances

Details of clearances are outlined below:

	Resolved	Investigated	Withdrawn	Total
Clearances	34 (33%)	42 (41%)	26 (26%)	102

Withdrawn cases

3.1 Complaints may be withdrawn for several reasons. For example, some complainants decide to withdraw their complaint when we explain to them the need to appeal against legislative decisions Jobcentre Plus has made, or they choose to take another route to redress. From time to time people also withdraw their complaint

Resolved cases

3.2 We try to resolve complaints by agreement between Jobcentre Plus and the complainant, as this generally represents a quicker and more satisfactory result for both. It is a positive that we are able to resolve a high percentage of Jobcentre Plus complaints, illustrating that Agency's willingness to work with us. However, it is also promising that Jobcentre Plus has acknowledged that the number of cases we are able to resolve is likely to indicate that there is scope for it to do more to address complaints in house at the earliest opportunity, in order to prevent them coming to ICE.

4. Outcomes

4.1 Our findings in respect of cases we could not resolve are detailed below. In cases where we find that an Agency has failed to provide an acceptable standard of service, we consider what action the Agency has subsequently taken to try to put things right. If the Agency has fully addressed the complaint and appropriate redress has been provided, offered or instigated prior to referral to ICE, we do not uphold the complaint.

4.2 The number of complaints that are not upheld is usually a good measure of the quality of the businesses' own response to the issues raised. It is very positive that such a high number of Jobcentre Plus cases have not been upheld by ICE.

	Fully Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld
Outcome of Investigation	2	7	33

5. Subject of Complaint

5.1 We recorded details of the subject of complaint for each element of complaint whether resolved or investigated. This has shown:

Subject	Resolved	Upheld	Not upheld	Summary
Delay	14	2	6	22
Error	31	6	44	81
No action taken	7	1	10	18

5.2 The most common subject of complaint appears to be error. However, it is again positive that the majority of these complaints are not upheld.

6. Average case clearance times

6.1 The average time taken to clear cases is detailed below:

	Resolution	Investigation	Withdrawn	ALL
Clearance Times	14.47	25.11	5.93	16.67

6.2 Average case clearance times have increased in respect of cases ICE has investigated, from 16.68 weeks in the first six months to 25.11 weeks by the end of the reporting period. This is partly as a result of the increase in the number of Jobcentre Plus cases being accepted for examination, but also because Jobcentre Plus' ability to respond within service level agreement times has reduced over the reporting period. The service level agreement has been re-negotiated in direct response to a request from Jobcentre Plus. This will allow all the businesses more time to respond.

7. Cases outstanding at 31 March 2008

	31 March 2008
Caseload	185

8. Financial redress

8.1 During this reporting period, our intervention resulted in the following sums of money being paid to individual complainants as detailed below.

Financial Redress	Amount
Gross inconvenience	£2,500.00
Gross embarrassment	£0.00
Financial Loss	£445.35
Interest	£133.35
Severe Distress	£100.00
Arrears of benefit	£6,185.48
Refund	£373.44
Rectify Errors	£0.00
Total	£9,737.62

9. Complaint resolution

Bouncebacks

9.1 During the 2007/08 period, a significant number of Jobcentre Plus complaints were accepted as “bouncebacks”. However, the change to the “bounceback” arrangements should result in a decrease in cases accepted for the next reporting period.

Resolution cases

9.2 A high percentage of Jobcentre Plus complaints have been resolved by ICE, and although this reflects a willingness to work with us to achieve resolution, Jobcentre Plus has acknowledged that it might also indicate its own failure to address the customers’ complaints satisfactorily and/or to offer the appropriate redress.

9.3 Jobcentre Plus has advised that as part of lessons learnt it has been sharing the outcomes of the resolution cases with its Regions and Districts. It has explained that its Regional and District Teams are responsible for the investigation of Chief Executive cases and they are able to reflect upon what should have been done when investigating the complaint. They believe this has helped to improve their complaint handling and to ensure that complaints have been fully and reasonably addressed.

9.4 Jobcentre Plus now plans to begin sharing these outcomes with its Secretariat Account Managers, who are responsible for the overall handling of Chief Executive cases. This will help them to improve their complaint handling and pick up key points and lessons learnt in order to apply these in future cases, and Jobcentre Plus has advised that this will be implemented from May this year.

Investigation cases

9.5 In respect of the cases that ICE has investigated, the majority are not upheld. This shows that Jobcentre Plus has taken positive steps to put matters right before the complainant came to ICE.

9.6 Our experience of Jobcentre Plus complaints remains that many are generally complex and intractable. We infer from this that only the most difficult complaints reach ICE. That is how it should be, and what we would ideally expect to find across the board.

Engagement with ICE

9.7 As previously highlighted in this report, Jobcentre Plus has struggled at times to meet service level agreements. However, we are optimistic that the recent extension to some SLA timescales will go some way towards addressing these problems. The relationship between Jobcentre Plus Focal Point and the ICE Office is cordial and productive.

10. Systemic Issues

10.1 An important part of the remit of the ICE is to act as a ‘critical friend’ to the different agencies/businesses for which we provide a service, the objective being to help the Department learn from complaints.

10.2 Our review of a complaint about an Agency can highlight the reason why problems arose and identify a potential for other people to experience similar

10.3 The following systemic issues were raised with Jobcentre Plus during this reporting period:

- In October 2007, we highlighted the lack of direction/signposting given to people moving from “credits only” into employment via New Deal (subsidised employment), in respect of their national insurance contributions position. Jobcentre Plus has accepted the recommendation and is issuing guidance to staff that will address this issue. As a result of our recommendation a communication has also been placed on the advisor web page to strengthen the advice that this information must be delivered to those customers who may be affected.
- In December 2007, we highlighted our concerns that there is no requirement to record exactly (a) which papers are referred to medical services for consideration, and (b) what information medical services has regard to in undertaking a medical examination/assessment. We received a response from Jobcentre Plus dated 14 April advising that it did not feel the recommendation was feasible. However, we have asked Jobcentre Plus to reconsider in light of a favourable response from the Northern Ireland Social Security Agency (NISSA) to the same recommendation. Jobcentre Plus responded in May 2008, making reference to the actions NISSA has agreed to take, and advising that the annual volume of cases received from Jobcentre Plus was in the region of 1 million, compared to 27,000 for NISSA. Jobcentre Plus also advised that the process used by NISSA was entirely clerical and medical services were not contracted out. In view of this, Jobcentre Plus advised that the resource implications of the suggested changes are significant and that they had seen no other evidence of a widespread problem. For those reasons they would not be taken forward in response to the two cases we had investigated in relation to these issues.
- In March 2008, we recommended that following an interview under caution Fraud Investigation Service (FIS) should advise customers that the process is likely to be lengthy. We received a response from Jobcentre Plus dated 27 May 2008, accepting this recommendation and advising that its policy and guidance teams are currently reviewing guidance to ensure it reflects this recommendation.
- Also in March 2008, we recommended that Jobcentre Plus consider making it a requirement that those making discretionary decisions in relation to Advisor Discretion Fund (ADF) should record the rationale for their decisions and ensure their retention until such time as any reconsideration or complaint about the decision have been exhausted. A full response was received from Jobcentre Plus dated 19 May 2008, advising that this issue had been referred to the DWP Delivery Director, who has agreed to review the relevant guidance for providers and the requirements placed on them. The Delivery Director has recently advised that he asked Commercial Directorate to write to all current providers to remind them of the importance of explaining decisions on expenditure clearly, so that customers are clear as to the purpose of the spend, its agreed use by the customer and the impact it will have on helping that customer back to work.

Supporting Evidence Part 2: The Pension Service Business Performance

1. Casework Statistics

The data and figures that follow are based on casework carried out in the twelve-month period between 1 April 2007 and 31 March 2008.

2. Complaints Received

2.1 Complaints received, accepted and failed during the period are outlined below:

	Received	Accepted	Failed
Complaints Received	190	100	90

2.2 The number of complaints from The Pension Service has increased from 71 received and 38 accepted in the first six months of the reporting period to 190 received and 100 accepted by the end of the financial year. The increase can probably be attributed to an increased awareness of the service provided by ICE.

3. Case clearances

Details of clearances are outlined below:

	Resolved	Investigated	Withdrawn	Total
Clearances	49 (72%)	14 (21%)	5 (7%)	68

Withdrawn cases

3.1 Complaints may be withdrawn for several reasons. For example, some complainants decide to withdraw their complaint when we explain to them the need to appeal against legislative decisions The Pension Service has made, or they choose to take another route to redress. From time to time people also withdraw their complaint because our explanations satisfy them that what has happened is appropriate. Other cases are withdrawn because The Pension Service has acted to address people's concerns.

Resolved cases

3.2 We try to resolve complaints by agreement between The Pension Service and the complainant, as this generally represents a quicker and more satisfactory result for both. It is in some respects a positive that a high number of The Pension Service complaints have been resolved, illustrating a willingness on the part of that Agency to work with us to achieve complaint resolution at the earliest opportunity. Conversely, the high proportion of The Pension Service complaints that are resolvable might indicate that more could be done in house to prevent those complaints from reaching ICE.

4. Outcomes

4.1 Our findings in respect of cases we could not resolve are detailed below. In cases where we find that the Agency has failed to provide an acceptable standard of

4.2 The number of complaints that are not upheld is usually a good measure of the quality of the businesses' own response to the issues raised. It is extremely positive that ICE has not upheld a high percentage of The Pension Service cases.

	Fully upheld	Partially Upheld	Not upheld
Outcome of investigation	3	4	7

5. Subject of Complaint

5.1 We recorded details of the subject of complaint for each element of complaint whether resolved or investigated. This has shown:

Subject	Resolved	Upheld	Not upheld	Summary
Delay	21	1	3	25
Error	31	4	9	44
No action taken	12	1	4	17

5.2 The most common subject of complaint appears to be error. However, it is again very positive that most of these complaints are either resolved or not upheld.

6. Average case clearance times

6.1 The average time taken to clear cases is detailed below:

	Resolution	Investigation	Withdrawn	ALL
Clearance Times	11.84	27.26	3.20	14.38

6.2 Average case clearance times have decreased in respect of cases ICE has investigated, from 31.80 weeks in the first six months to 27.26 in the latter period. This may be partly because the number of cases investigated is still quite low, but is also attributable to the fact that The Pension Service is exemplary in the speed with which it provides responses.

7. Cases outstanding at 31 March 2008

	31 March 2008
Caseload	48

8. Financial Redress

8.1 During the reporting year our intervention resulted in the following sums of money being paid to individual complainants as detailed below:

Financial Redress	Amount
Gross inconvenience	£4,025.00
Gross embarrassment	£100.00
Financial Loss	£9,685.18
Interest	£395.67
Severe Distress	£100.00
Arrears of Benefit	£0.00
Refund	£929.80
Rectify Error	£1,029.92
Total	£16,265.57

9. Complaint resolution – Key issues

Resolution cases

9.1 A high number of complaints have been resolved by ICE, reflecting The Pension Service's willingness to work with us to achieve resolution but potentially also indicating that more might be done internally by The Pension Service to resolve complaints at an earlier stage.

Investigation cases

9.2 50% of The Pension Service complaints are not upheld, demonstrating that it has dealt effectively with those complaints before the complainant came to ICE.

Engagement with ICE

9.3 Our experience of dealing with The Pension Service Focal Point is very positive. The Pension Service is an exemplar in meeting SLA requirements and providing ICE with the required information.

10. Systemic Issues

10.1 An important part of the remit of the ICE is to act as a 'critical friend' to the different agencies/businesses for which we provide a service, the objective being to help the Department learn from complaints.

10.2 Our review of a person's complaint about an Agency can highlight the reason why problems arose and identify a potential for other people to experience similar difficulties. The ICE raises such systemic issues at senior levels within the Agency, and is pleased to acknowledge instances where the Agency has tried to learn from past mistakes and failings, and has taken steps to improve its service to customers.

10.3 The following systemic issues have been raised with The Pension Service during this reporting period:

- In June 2007, we highlighted an issue regarding retention of information in respect of customer correspondence/communication. The Pension Service responded in July, outlining cost/volumes involved in recording details of all customer communications. It also advised that as part of The Pension Service transformation journey, it will soon have the ability to track and identify all correspondence received, using new IT systems, which allow scanning of documents. The expectation is that this pilot will begin towards the end of 2008, with a full rollout on completion of the pilot.
- In June 2007, we highlighted an issue regarding the process of de-combining payments for weekly paid customers, following cessation of Pension Credit and the issue of information available to customers who need to make a decision as to what to do with an inherited property, and how any such decision might impact on their entitlement to Pension Credit. The Pension Service responded in July, advising that our recommendation in respect of de-combining payments had been pre-empted, and later in the year changes would be made to the way change of circumstances are handled. The Pension Service also advised that the booklet issued to customers briefly explains the sort of changes a customer must report. However, providing additional information could potentially be misleading.
- Also in June 2007, we highlighted that our view was that the information contained in the standard letter notifying of Winter Fuel payment is contradictory and potentially misleading. The Pension Service responded in July outlining the number of Winter Fuel Payments made this year, and commented on the fact that it had only received one complaint regarding the wording of the notification. We wrote back to The Pension Service in August, pointing out that our view remained that the standard letter was open to interpretation. It subsequently responded in September advising that it had instructed the Business Products Team to consider re-wording the notification in its next round of reviews, due in the 2008/09 financial year. In May 2008, The Pension Service advised that a review had been completed, and a decision had been made not to review the letter as there had been no further evidence of problems arising in relation to this, and, that priority had to be given to incorporating detail about the additional Winter Fuel payment for this year, that was announced in the 2008 budget. We considered this response and accepted it.
- In March 2008, we recommended that The Pension Service review instructions regarding the maintenance of the "forms issued field" (RP801) within its database. The Pension Service has advised that it has issued a bulletin to all relevant staff to ensure its business handling is robust in the area highlighted. The bulletin will serve as a reminder to staff of the recording, storage and retrieval procedures which should be followed at the claims build or post award stage of a State Pension claim. The Pension Service also said that the

- Also in March 2008, we highlighted a possible systemic fault in the interpretation of the Pensions Procedures Guidance. We raised the issue of guidance in cases where the claimant has not indicated that they wish to claim Adult Dependency Increases for their spouse if they are under the state pension age. We also asked The Pension Service to clarify how confident it is that all relevant information is captured on screen prints, so that when the paper copies are properly destroyed there is a robust enough audit trail on the screen prints to enable subsequent complaints to be investigated. We received an acknowledgement from The Pension Service on 25 April 2008, advising that an analysis is being undertaken, following which an appraisal of the situation will be provided. The Pension Service wrote to ICE again on 6 June 2008, advising that it accepted the recommendation regarding the systemic issue for customers claiming Adult Dependency Increase for a spouse. In order to address this the guidance and supporting products will be updated to ensure that these claims are administered appropriately and that customers are fully aware of the criteria for claiming. With regard to being confident that all relevant information is captured on screen prints, The Pension Service advised that staff are following correct procedures, and that screen prints are filed and destroyed appropriately. A Pensions Group Bulletin has also been issued to instruct staff of the correct procedures around data retention.

10.4 I am also pleased to acknowledge instances when the agencies/businesses we deal with have tried to learn from past mistakes and failings, and have taken steps to improve its service to customers. The Pension Service has been very proactive in this respect.

10.5 The Pension Service has advised that its Focal Point produces a Lessons Learned Log (LLL), to capture findings highlighted by ICE, which it:

- Presents to its Customer Service business partners quarterly.
- Publishes on its intranet site.
- Asks The Pension Centre Customer Service officers how they use LLL information to ensure staff are learning lessons.
- Shares feedback around all Pension Centres and its Customer Service business partners, because different Pension Centres use different methods.

10.6 The Pension Service Focal Point has also revised the LLL to reflect the Parliamentary Ombudsman's values, as published in her booklet "Principles of Good Administration", thereby presenting the Ombudsman's stated values direct to staff in respect of Pension Centre casework. This helps highlight those failings identified by ICE (and PHSO) against the Principles, and aims to get staff thinking of failing in the same terms as the 6 Principles. The Pension Service Intranet site also reflects the Principles.

10.7 The Pension Service Focal Point has instigated and introduced collaborative working practices with ICE whereby it scrutinises all ICE submissions at

- 10.8 The Focal Point addresses ongoing issues in light of any ICE (and PHSO) concerns, and case specific examples of performance are used in their workshops/presentations and educational visits to Pension Centre staff.
- 10.9 The Pension Service has also advised that in line with continuous improvement, the throughput of ICE findings, case by case, allows Focal Point to build up current thinking and enhance its own expertise in Remedy & Resolutions, enabling it to actively pursue remedies with Pension Centre business partners to enhance complaint handling business, ahead of further involvement from ICE. This can influence product quality through verbal exchanges, promoting established ICE views on maladministration.

Supporting Evidence Part 3: Disability and Carers Service Business Performance

1. Casework statistics

The data and figures that follow are based on casework carried out in the period between 1 April 2007 and 31 March 2008.

2. Complaints Received

2.1 Complaints received, accepted and failed during the period are outlined below:

	Received	Accepted	Failed
Complaints Received	64	32	32

3. Case clearances

Details of clearances are outlined below:

	Resolved	Investigated	Withdrawn	Total
Clearances	11 (35%)	16 (52%)	4 (13%)	31

Withdrawn cases

3.1 Complaints may be withdrawn for several reasons. For example, some complainants decide to withdraw their complaint when we explain to them the need to appeal against legislative decisions Disability and Carers Service has made, or they choose to take another route to redress. From time to time people also withdraw their complaint because our explanations satisfy them that what has happened is appropriate. Other cases are withdrawn because Disability and Carers Service has acted to address people's concerns.

Resolved cases

3.2 We try to resolve complaints by agreement between an Agency and the complainant, as this generally represents a quicker and more satisfactory result for both. It is positive in that context to see that Disability and Carers Service is resolving cases where there is scope to do so. However, while it is the case that ICE is able to resolve a lower percentage of Disability and Carers Service cases than other Agencies, we see this as also being a positive. Our experience is that there is limited scope for resolution of Disability and Carers Service cases, which are generally complex, because the Agency itself has commonly already explored all avenues for resolution before the complaint reaches ICE.

4. Outcomes

4.1 Our findings in respect of cases we could not resolve are detailed below. In cases where we find that an Agency has failed to provide an acceptable standard of service, in determining whether to uphold a complaint we consider what action the Agency has taken subsequently to try to put things right. If the Agency has fully addressed the complaint and appropriate redress has been provided, offered or instigated prior to referral to ICE, we do not uphold the complaint.

4.2 We have seen particularly promising results in respect of Disability and Carers Service, in that the great majority of the cases we have investigated have not been upheld. This reflects very well on Disability and Carers Service customer service and particularly on the standard of its internal complaints resolution practices.

	Fully Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld
Outcome of investigation	1	4	11

5. Subject of Complaint

5.1 We recorded details of the subject of complaint for each element of complaint whether resolved or investigated. This has shown:

Subject	Resolved	Upheld	Not upheld	Summary
Delay	4	0	2	6
Error	10	2	14	26
No action taken	0	1	4	5

5.2 Perceived error seems to be the main cause of complaint from Disability and Carers Service customers. However, it is very positive that most complaints are not upheld.

6. Average case clearance times

6.1 The average time taken to clear cases is detailed below:

	Resolution	Investigation	Withdrawn	ALL
Clearance Times	11.44	19.73	10.86	15.64

7. Cases outstanding at 31 March 2008

	31 March 2008
Caseload	8

8. Financial Redress

8.1 During the first six months of this reporting period our intervention resulted in the following sums of money being paid to individual complainants as detailed below.

Financial Redress	Amount
Gross inconvenience	£1,450.00
Gross embarrassment	£0.00
Financial Loss	£2,420.43
Interest	£189.37
Severe Distress	£000.00
Arrears of benefit	£0.00
Refund	£0.00
Rectify Error	£0.00
Total	£4,059.80

9. Complaint Resolution

Clearances

9.1 From the cases we have seen, many Disability and Carers Service complaints stem from a desire on the part of the complainant to change the outcome of a benefit claim. We therefore have to take care to ensure that complainants understand the scope of our jurisdiction.

9.2 Disability and Carers Service complaints are on the whole very complex in comparison to other DWP businesses, and as such, we need to provide much more detailed information in order to resolve the complaint.

Engagement with ICE

9.3 ICE experience of dealing with Disability and Carers Service is very positive. It is timely in its responses and always makes every effort to ensure it provides ICE with comprehensive/well indexed data to inform our examinations.

10. Systemic Issues

10.1 An important part of the remit of the ICE is to act as a 'critical friend' to the different agencies/businesses for which we provide a service, the objective being to help the Department learn from complaints.

10.2 Our review of a complaint about an Agency can highlight the reason why problems arose and identify a potential for other people to experience similar difficulties. The ICE raises such systemic issues at senior levels within the Agency, and is pleased to acknowledge instances where the Agency has tried to learn from past mistakes and failings, and has taken steps to improve its service to customers.

10.4 The following systemic issues were raised during this reporting period:

- In May 2007, we highlighted an issue around the fact that there are no comprehensive instructions/guidance to staff on how to split Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for a child, in cases where the parents share care of the child.

- In November 2007, we raised an issue concerning information contained in a general benefits information leaflet, which a complainant maintained led him to believe that his wife needed to be disabled or likely to die within six months in order to claim DLA. Disability and Carers Service response of January 2008 advises that attempts are ongoing to improve the information provided to customers, and that this particular leaflet is being replaced as part of this process. It advises that ICE concerns will be taken into account as part of the process.

10.3 I am pleased to acknowledge instances when the agency/businesses we deal with have tried to learn from past mistakes and failings, and have taken steps to improve its service to customers. Disability and Carers Service has advised that following an ICE investigation which revealed that the customer had been incorrectly signposted in the 2nd tier response to his complaint, the relevant team was reminded of the correct process and an apology was sent from the Unit Manager.

10.4 Disability and Carers Service also advised that this year has seen the introduction of a 3 tier escalation process for its customers who remain dissatisfied with the outcome of a special payment consideration. ICE interest and, in particular, concerns that the customer was unable to ultimately take their dissatisfaction to the ICE, was one of the drivers for this move to a 3 tier process.

Supporting Evidence Part 4: Debt Management Business Performance

1. Casework Statistics

The data and figures that follow are based on casework carried out in the period between 1 April 2007 and 31 March 2008.

2. Complaints Received

2.1 Complaints received, accepted and failed during the period are outlined below:

	Received	Accepted	Failed
Complaints Received	52	20	32

2.2 Complaints in respect of Debt Management have increased from 15 received and 9 accepted during the first six months of the reporting period, to 52 received and 20 accepted by the end of the financial year. This is probably as a result of more Debt Management customers being aware of ICE.

3. Case clearances

Details of clearances are outlined below:

	Resolved	Investigated	Withdrawn	Total
Clearances	5 (46%)	3 (27%)	3 (27%)	11

Withdrawn cases

3.1 Complaints may be withdrawn for several reasons. For example, some complainants decide to withdraw their complaint when we explain to them the need to appeal against legislative decisions Debt Management has made, or they choose to take another route to redress. From time to time people also withdraw their complaint because our explanations satisfy them that what has happened is appropriate. Other cases are withdrawn because Debt Management has acted to address people's concerns.

Resolved cases

3.2 We try to resolve complaints by agreement between the business and the complainant, as this generally represents a quicker and more satisfactory result for both. Although we are still seeing relatively small numbers, it is promising that the majority of Debt Management cases are resolved.

4. Outcomes

4.1 Our findings in respect of cases we could not resolve are detailed below. In cases where we find that the business has failed to provide an acceptable standard of service, in determining whether to uphold a complaint we consider what action the Agency has subsequently taken to try to put things right. If the business has fully addressed the complaint and appropriate redress has been provided, offered or instigated prior to referral to ICE, we do not uphold the complaint.

4.2 Again, although the number of Debt Management cases we have investigated is low, it is promising that most of them have not been upheld.

	Fully upheld	Partially Upheld	Not upheld
Outcome of investigation	0	1	2

5. Subject of Complaint

5.1 We recorded details of the subject of complaint for each element of complaint whether resolved or investigated. This has shown:

Subject	Resolved	Upheld	Not upheld	Summary
Delay	1	0	1	2
Error	5	1	4	10
No action taken	1	0	0	1

5.2 The most common subject of complaint appears to be error. Numbers are too small to allow conclusions to be drawn.

6. Average case clearance times

6.1 The average time taken to clear cases is detailed below:

	Resolution	Investigation	Withdrawn	ALL
Clearance Times	13.77	34.88	15.72	20.06

6.2 Average case clearance times appear to be very high in respect of cases ICE has investigated. However, to put this into perspective, these figures are in respect of three cases only, two which were "cross cutting" cases which involved another agency/business, and the remaining case was particularly contentious.

7. Cases outstanding at 31 March 2008

	31 March 2008
Caseload	14

8. Financial redress

8.1 During the first six months of this reporting period our intervention resulted in the following sums of money being paid to individual complainants as detailed below.

Financial Redress	Amount
Gross inconvenience	£350.00
Gross Embarrassment	£0.00
Financial Loss	£79.95
Interest	£0.00
Severe Distress	£0.00
Arrears of Benefit	£0.00
Refund	£46.54
Rectify Errors	£0.00
Total	£476.49

9. Complaint resolution - Key issues

9.1 Our experience so far suggests that complaints received involving Debt Management generally also involve another Agency. We currently have several such cases in play.

10. Steps taken by Debt Management

10.1 I am pleased to acknowledge instances when the agencies/businesses we deal with have tried to learn from past mistakes and failings, and have taken steps to improve its service to customers.

10.2 Debt Management has acknowledged that those complaints that have progressed to ICE have often arisen because staff failed in the first instance to follow set procedures and guidance, and where this has arisen staff have been reminded accordingly.

10.3 For example: one customer complained that Debt Management failed to correctly post automated computer letters to his address abroad. This resulted in the non receipt of a notification that deductions were to be taken from benefit, accordingly deductions were taken from benefit before the customer had been notified; and he was therefore unable to contact the Debt Centre regarding the high rate of deduction. The process in place involved 'a work around' but was not followed. Recent changes have been made to the computer system to eradicate this problem, whilst the need for change had been recognised prior to the ICE investigation, the investigation itself was instrumental in highlighting the distress and inconvenience caused to customers through not following the procedures in place.

10.4 Debt Management has also advised that ICE involvement has brought a more focused approach to complaints handling within the organisation, and that there is an increased awareness and determination to try to resolve complaints in the first instance and where appropriate at the subsequent escalation points.

Supporting Evidence Part 5: The Rent Service Business Performance

1. Casework Statistics

The data and figures that follow are based on casework carried out in the period between 1 April 2007 and 31 March 2008.

2. Complaints Received

2.1 Complaints received, accepted and failed during the period are outlined below:

	Received	Accepted	Failed
Complaints Received	9	1	8

3. Cases outstanding at 31 March 2008

	31 March 2008
Caseload	1

Supporting Evidence Part 6: Child Support Agency Business Performance

1. Casework Statistics

The data and figures that follow are based on casework carried out in the twelve month period between 1 April 2007 and 31 March 2008. Comparisons are made with the twelve months from 1 April 2006 and 31 March 2007.

2. Complaints Received

2.1 Complaints received and accepted for action during the period, and the number of fails are outlined below.

	1/4/06-31/3/07	1/4/07-31/3/08	Variances
Received	3823	3800	-0.6%
Accepted	1698	1644	-3.2%
Fails	2125	2156	1.5%

2.2 During the first six months of the reporting period, the number of complaints received increased considerably. The most apparent reason for this is the length of time the Agency was taking to address the complaint before it comes to ICE. However, following the suspension of “bounceback” arrangements numbers decreased towards the latter six months, in comparison to the previous year.

3. Case clearances

Details of clearances are outlined below:

	1/4/06-31/3/07	1/4/07-31/3/08	Variances
Resolution	1086	1203	10.8%
Investigation	341	277	-18.8%
Withdrawn	176	151	-14.2%
Total	1603	1631	1.93%

Withdrawn cases

3.1 Complaints may be withdrawn for several reasons. For example, some complainants decide to withdraw their complaint when we explain to them the need to appeal against decisions an Agency has made, or they choose to take another route to redress. From time to time people also withdraw their complaint because our explanations satisfy them that what has happened is appropriate. Other cases are withdrawn because an Agency has acted to address people’s concerns.

Resolved cases

3.2 We try to reach settlement of complaints by agreement between the Agency and the complainant, as this generally represents a quicker and more satisfactory result for both. The high number of cases we have managed to resolve has increased further this year by 10.8%. This is extremely positive in the light of the problems we have experienced in securing information from the CSA. From an Agency perspective, however, there is also a negative side in that the opportunity to resolve complaints grasped by ICE might have been grasped at an earlier point by the Agency itself.

4. Outcomes

4.1 Our findings in respect of cases we could not resolve are detailed below. In cases where we find that the Agency has failed to provide an acceptable standard of service, when determining whether to uphold a complaint we consider what action the Agency has taken subsequently to try to put things right. If the Agency has fully addressed the complaint and appropriate redress has been provided, offered or instigated prior to referral to ICE, we do not uphold the complaint.

4.2 The percentage of cases fully or partially upheld in respect of CSA has remained disappointingly high. The intention of the Agency in introducing its new complaints procedure was that complaints would be resolved internally and that the percentage of cases not upheld following investigation by ICE would increase. Disappointingly, we had not seen evidence of this planned improvement by the end of the reporting year.

	1/4/06-31/3/07	1/4/07-31/3/08	Variations
Fully upheld	135 (39.6%)	109 (39%)	-19.3%
Partially upheld	154 (45%)	130 (47%)	-15.6%
Not upheld	52 (15%)	38 (14%)	-26.9%
Total	341	277	-18.8%

5. Subjects of complaint

5.1 We recorded details of the subject of complaint for each element of complaint whether resolved or investigated. This has shown:

Subject of complaint 1/4/06- 31/3/07	Upheld	Not upheld	Resolved
Delay	173	50	776
Error	163	143	523
No action taken	183	95	559
Other	69	70	271

Subject of complaint 1/4/07- 31/3/08	Upheld	Not upheld	Resolved
Delay	126	37	822
Error	144	119	607
No action taken	151	67	723
Other	58	49	290

5.2 Delay and no action taken still seem to be the main areas of concern for CSA complainants. The fact that a very high number of these cases were subsequently resolved suggests that the Agency could have done more to put things right in the first instance. In addition, of the cases in respect of these areas that required an investigation, a high number were upheld.

6. Average case clearance times

6.1 The average time taken to clear cases is detailed below. Clearance times have increased in all areas of the ICE process, especially resolution where clearance times have increased by 30.2% in comparison to the previous 12 months. However, as stated earlier in this report, ICE clearance times have been significantly affected by the Agency's delay in providing evidence and meeting other SLA commitments.

	1/4/06-31/3/07	1/4/07-31/3/08	Variances
Resolution	14.41	18.77	30.2%
Investigation	39.12	41.73	6.7%
Withdrawn	9.09	10.92	20.1%
ALL	19.08	21.94	15.0%

7. Caseload

Case load 1/4/06 – 31/03/07	723
Case load 1/4/07 – 31/03/08	737

7.1 The caseload for the first six months of the reporting period increased dramatically from 588 to 1108 because of the high number of "bounceback" cases we were receiving from CSA. However, following the suspension of the "bounceback" cases, the caseload had fallen back by the end of the reporting period, and is now in line with the numbers for the previous year. Notwithstanding the high number of CSA complaints received relative to those received from other agencies, we acknowledge that ICE deals with only a small percentage of the Agency's live load.

8. Financial Redress

8.1 During the first six months of this reporting period our intervention resulted in significant sums of money being paid to individual complainants as detailed below. Financial redress awarded for the reporting period amounts to over £990,000, an increase of 21.0% on the previous twelve months. This supports our previous experience that the Agency is not routinely considering financial redress before the complaint comes to ICE and unfortunately seems to have been less likely to have done so this year than in previous years. More information about this can be found at paragraph 10.4.

8.2 The Agency agreed this year to award consolatory payments specifically to acknowledge significant service failures impacting on our progression of a case, or in closed cases where our recommendations have not been implemented (these “botheration” payments are referred to in more detail in paragraph 9.11 below). Since the introduction of these payments on 28 June 2007, over £26,500 has been awarded to complainants by the Agency.

8.3 Furthermore, payments awarded in respect of gross embarrassment have increased by over 66% - although the figure awarded is relatively small in comparison to other types of awards, it is still a significant increase compared to the previous financial year. There has also been a significant increase in payments in respect of financial loss.

	1/4/06-31/3/07	1/4/07-31/3/08	Variance
Advanced Payment	£313,385.64	£302,754.91	-3.4%
Botheration Payment	£0.00	£26,615.00	N/A
Gross Embarrassment	£675.00	£1,125.00	66.7%
Gross Inconvenience	£74,339.62	£102,139.11	37.4%
Financial Loss	£305,498.59	£401,474.15	47.4%
Interest	£44,476.01	£49,301.98	10.9%
Rationalisation/Suspension	£56,032.18	£50,662.00	-9.6%
Rectify errors	£1,641.31	£2,321.61	41.4%
Refund	£21,702.85	£22,745.34	4.8%
Severe Distress	£1,300.00	£1,295.00	-0.4%
Total	£819,051.20	£990,734.10	21%

9. Complaint Resolution

9.1 It has been a particularly difficult year for Agency staff who are responsible for complaints because of the negative impact of changes to the complaints process. I have been impressed by the general motivation of Agency staff to do their best for complainants, although sometimes I appreciate that they are thwarted in their efforts by factors outside of their personal control. In some instances, inexperienced staff have been tasked with looking at ICE cases, and have been thrown in at the deep end in attempting to provide information to ICE about cases in which they have had no prior involvement. While a process change of the type and scale undertaken by CSA was almost bound to have a significant and, in the short term, negative impact and this had

9.2 Despite this I have seen a commitment from Agency staff to provide requested information which is long overdue as quickly as possible. Agency staff have also shown an enthusiastic and positive approach to forging good working relationships with ICE in order to achieve a positive outcome for complainants.

9.3 This is reinforced by the fact that we are continuing to clear a high number of cases by resolution, which would not be possible without the Agency providing us with the relevant information required to determine whether maladministration has occurred and to identify what action can be taken to put things right. The Agency's performance has steadily improved and stabilised over the latter part of the reporting period.

9.4 I also appreciate the Agency's willingness to work together with this office to achieve the best for complainants, for example by arranging for new complaints team managers to visit the ICE office after the Agency introduced the changes to its complaint process. It was clear at that time that staff would benefit from a greater understanding of the role of ICE, and its processes, and of the reasons for some of the requests made by ICE. A lack of full awareness led to some lack of co-operation and to poor quality responses which impacted on our work.

9.5 We discussed this with the Agency, and it was agreed that in order to improve mutual understanding, and to forge good working relationships, a team of staff from ICE would spend three days with the Agency. The workshops received very positive feedback from both ICE and the Agency. ICE staff noted a great improvement in the responses received as Agency staff had gained a better understanding. Also, better working relationships were forged between ICE and the Agency, as a result of meeting with the staff with whom they were liaising.

9.6 Nevertheless, the problems the Agency encountered with the implementation of its new complaints process had a major impact on how we conduct our business. Our ability to respond to complaints is dependent on the Agency providing us with the information we need to determine whether maladministration has occurred and to identify what action can be taken to put things right. The Agency's inability at times during this year to adhere to SLA timescales at all stages of the process has inhibited our clearances, and has had a detrimental effect on the service we provide to our complainants. This has resulted in:

- Complainants being denied resolution of their complaints for an unacceptable length of time
- Considerable resources in ICE being diverted to pursue escalation work and respond to complainants
- PHSO being drawn into considering complaints because ICE cannot secure the response required to clear matters

9.7 As a result of the issues we have encountered with the Agency we have had to critically review the way in which we deliver our services. Following constructive engagement with the Department and senior Agency managers, the following changes were made to our processes:

9.8 “Bounceback” cases

9.8.1 We have for some time been aware that a significant number of complainants experience considerable difficulty in navigating CSA internal Agency systems and in securing an appropriate and proportionate response within a reasonable timeframe. Cases we see have highlighted problems in the following areas:

- Complaints reviewed within the first (Resolution) tier where there have been multiple attempts to secure resolution without a signpost to the next tier of the internal complaint handling process.
- Complaints reviewed within the Resolution tier, and signposted to a named manager overseeing that tier rather than to the second tier (Review).
- Complaints in which further action is identified by the named manager who returns the case to the first tier to undertake the work and to develop a further response (which might include a signpost to the review tier but might equally be signposted again to the named manager).

9.8.2 Complainants who are frustrated by the above are approaching ICE before CSA has offered a final response because they believe the problems they are experiencing are not being addressed. But ICE cannot pick those complaints up at that stage, and is obliged to return them to CSA for action. Often those cases are referred by the CSA focal point to the Resolution tier. For much of the year there was a regrettable lack of management control to ensure that the issues raised were afforded sufficient priority to prevent the complainants from returning to ICE, although latterly CSA has been actively co-operating with this office to improve the situation.

9.8.3 These problems caused a very significant increase in ICE workload in the first half of 2007/08. In addition, there was a real concern in the Department that the premature involvement of ICE in cases which had not been fully addressed by CSA was circumventing policy intent and effectively shifting responsibility for addressing complaints away from the Agency. For all of these reasons, following in depth discussion with stewards, we have agreed to temporarily suspend “bounceback” arrangements. For the time being, we are not routinely accepting complaints until and unless complainants have received a Review tier response. We have been assured that complainants who have been advised by us to write to an Agency senior manager, will be afforded a prompt reply. For the most part, our experience is that this is now happening. However, where I consider a complainant has waited an unreasonably lengthy period of time for the Agency to respond I have accepted the case for examination, and I will continue to do so.

9.9 Exit arrangements

9.9.1 At the beginning of the year, a considerable amount of time and resources was being expended chasing up overdue recommendations when our action had otherwise ended. Not only did this put unsustainable pressure on ICE resources, but our prolonged involvement in closed cases was in some instances raising complainants’ expectations of success and potentially preventing or deterring them from escalating their complaints to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO), leaving ICE vulnerable to criticism from that quarter.

9.9.2 To address this problem, again in consultation with stewards, in October 2007 we introduced new “exit” arrangements whereby, if an Agency fails to implement agreed resolution actions or to implement recommendations within agreed timescales,

9.9.3 Since these arrangements were introduced on 1 October 2007, to the end of February 2008, I have had to exit from 51 cases. However, I am pleased to report that following productive discussions with senior managers we have not had to deploy exit arrangements in any cases since then. Furthermore, of the 51 cases from which we exited the Agency has subsequently implemented the outstanding resolutions or recommendations in 47 of the cases and is proactively pursuing solutions in the remainder, some of which it has reported to be particularly intractable.

9.10 Changes to escalation procedures

9.10.1 CSA reviews ICE draft reports and is expected to offer technical assurance and to reflect upon the findings and remedies that are included. The aim is to deliver a product that is factually accurate, technically sound and with outcomes that are deliverable in content and timescales.

9.10.2 ICE has experienced considerable delays in securing information needed to examine complaints and in securing response to draft reports as well as the delays described above in getting agreed resolutions/recommendations implemented.

9.10.3 We have for some time had escalation procedures in place to ensure that if progress on a case is delayed, or there are disagreements with the CSA concerning requests for information, implementation of recommendations etc things do not stand still, key staff are alerted and the problem is dealt with at the appropriate level.

9.10.4 During 2007/08, the problems CSA was experiencing in relation to the new organisation prevented it from taking prompt action, and we spent a considerable amount of resources escalating cases in which the Agency had failed to adhere to the SLA. Our escalation process consisted of three stages, which ultimately lead to a referral to a Senior Agency Manager at stage 3. However, despite our exhausting all three stages, the Agency was still not providing us with the required information in very many cases.

9.10.5 Consequently, we have revised our escalation process, and we now provide the Agency with a weekly list, detailing all current outstanding action. This has reduced the bureaucracy and offers a barometer that measures progress. We have also introduced more regular dialogue between senior officials in both organisations to ensure that problems are highlighted and addressed at the earliest opportunity. I am pleased to report that CSA has responded positively to these measures and that while there are still pockets of intractable problems, outstanding actions are steadily decreasing, and performance has noticeably improved.

9.11 Botheration payments

9.11.1 Once this office has accepted a complaint we require the co-operation of the Agency to examine the issues raised. Following discussion with the Agency, and in view of the number of cases reflecting considerable delay, it was agreed that we would seek additional consolatory payments in appropriate situations. These are termed botheration payments. A botheration payment will be recommended whenever a significant failure on the part of the Agency to adhere to service level agreement timescales has resulted in a negative and detrimental impact to the complainant beyond that identified by an ICE investigation of the original complaint.

9.11.2 The amount to be awarded will be at the discretion of the Agency and in line with the FRM Guide 2003. We expect the amount awarded to be proportionate to the level of impact on the complainant.

9.12 Action the Agency has taken

9.12.1 As acknowledged above, the Agency has taken steps to address the problems, including:

- re-deploying experienced staff to deal with clerical cases with an ICE involvement
- awarding botheration payments where appropriate
- making changes to its complaints process so that all failed ICE gateway cases are now managed by dedicated teams
- making improvements to the organisation and a senior management focus on ICE work

9.12.2 These measures are beginning to have a real impact on the problems and the situation is gradually reverting to steady state. I hope and expect that these improvements will be maintained during the current year and that complainants to CSA and to this office will receive a greatly enhanced level of service to that experienced in 2007/08.

10. Key issues identified from ICE examination of complaints

10.1 We are still seeing a number of cases where the Agency's failure to take timely and appropriate action has resulted in the accrual of significant arrears. Furthermore, the Agency has too often failed to take the opportunity to put things right before the case comes to ICE. The following example illustrates this:

Mrs Y complained amongst other things that she made an application to the Agency in 1997 when she was in receipt of Income Support, and the Agency failed to take any action. She ceased to claim Income Support in May 2002, and the Agency failed to secure regular maintenance, resulting in arrears accruing on her case.

Our investigation revealed that when the non-resident parent failed to return a maintenance enquiry form issued to him in January 1996, the Agency did not impose an interim maintenance assessment until 31 October 1997. As a consequence of the Agency's delay, no liability was established for the period from January 1996 up until the imposition of the interim maintenance assessment in October 1997. For part of this period Mrs Y was receiving a prescribed benefit so was not disadvantaged. However, for the period following 11 April 1996 (when her benefit ceased) up until 30 October 1997, we identified that she may have suffered a potential loss of maintenance, and also lost the opportunity to obtain Child Maintenance Bonus.

Mrs Y also experienced further delays when the Agency failed to take appropriate action following the imposition of the interim maintenance assessment. Nor did the Agency keep her case up to date. For example, when her claim for prescribed benefit ceased in February 2003 it did not adjust her maintenance accounts. As a result payments received from the non resident parent after this date continued to be retained by the Secretary of State when they should have been paid to her.

In response to our recommendations, the Agency made an award to Mrs Y, totalling over £6000, consisting of a financial loss award with interest amounting to almost £4000, an advance payment in respect of maintenance arrears owing totalling over £2000, and a consolatory payment of £200 in recognition of the gross inconvenience caused by its maladministration.

10.2 Enforcement and compliance

10.2.1 Although enforcement and compliance is a recurring theme of the complaints we see at ICE, I am mindful that this needs to be put into perspective: ICE deals with a small percentage of the Agency's live load, and often sees the more problematic cases. Despite the problems we see, we are aware that the Agency is getting more money for children than ever before and getting better at enforcement. The Agency has advised that it achieved collection of child maintenance payments amounting to £1 billion in 2007/08, a huge step forward in the collection of child maintenance and debt collection.

10.2.2 The Agency has a responsibility to try to effectively collect maintenance from all non-resident parents who have a liability to pay for the upkeep of their children. From the cases I see it seems that CSA follows a series of steps automatically rather than looking at what would be the most appropriate or effective for the particular case. In my experience, the Agency is still reluctant to use more than one enforcement tool at the same time. For example, where there is a DEO in place, but the Agency is aware that it will not be able to recover the outstanding debt within two years, then I believe it should be looking at other methods of enforcement. From the cases we see, where a DEO subsequently fails, the Agency does not necessarily follow this up with an application for a Liability Order.

10.2.3 In particular, we have found that there is a failure to consider the use of charging orders to secure substantial amounts of child debt owed. Even in cases where charging orders are sought, delays in the process have led to non-resident parents being able to sell or transfer their share in heritable property to thwart the charging order. Delays between the provision of notice to the non resident parent, and the obtaining of the liability/charging order can and do cause problems. ICE has recommended that the Agency seek an Interim Order as early in the process as possible, inhibiting such transactions on the heritable property.

10.2.4 I am encouraged to note that senior managers within the Agency are promoting the concurrent utilisation of all available enforcement methods. The Agency's Director of Legal Enforcement visited ICE in October 2007 to discuss what action the Agency is taking.

10.2.5 There appears to me to be considerable scope for the Agency to become more efficient in its enforcement of debt by considering cases holistically and making better use of the powers it already has, rather than following a series of disjointed enforcement steps.

10.2.6 It is our experience that some non-resident parents have become adept at prolonging the processes by way of adjournment, buying them time to enable the sale or transfer of heritable property that they own to take place. I believe that the Agency should be seeking to inhibit sales and transfers of identified property owned by the non-

10.2.7 I have raised these issues with the Agency, and I have additionally raised a small number of legislative matters, based on my examination of cases. I have now agreed with the Agency a formal route for drawing such issues to their attention and to the attention of the relevant policy director.

10.3 Deduction from Earnings Order

10.3.1 For most cases, where non-resident parents are employed, deduction from earnings can be an effective method of collecting payments from a non-resident parent who might otherwise be reluctant to meet their liabilities. An employer is legally required to operate a deduction order and failure to do so can lead to criminal proceedings against them. It is disappointing when this effective collection method is undermined by a non-resident parent changing employment.

10.3.2 As a result of enquiries made by ICE it transpired that the legislation effective from 2003 had given the Agency the power to prosecute NRPs who were paying maintenance via DEO, who left their employer and failed to alert CSA to their new employment situation. The Agency had been slow to enact this power. Its response, however, was very positive in that it has quickly sought to develop the framework that will enable it to apply this sanction. It is trialling the arrangements and hopes to roll it out in the summer of 2008. I am pleased to see that this has now been included in The Child Support Regulations of April 2008.

10.3.3 Even in cases where the Agency has correctly imposed a DEO and therefore taken appropriate enforcement action, there is still scope for problems to occur when the NRP has a change in his circumstances, as the following example illustrates:

Mr X complained, amongst other things, that the Agency deducted payments via a DEO from January to May 2005, but payments were not credited to his account which caused arrears to accrue. He also complained that following a review of the maintenance calculation completed in November 2006, the Agency failed to issue a revised DEO until April 2007. As a result he overpaid maintenance and this overpayment caused him and his family financial hardship.

As a result of our enquiries, it came to light that payments deducted from earnings between January and May 2005 had been received, but had been allocated to an incorrect account.

The Agency also accepted that it had delayed in revising the liability when he had reported a reduction in earnings in October 2006. A revised DEO was not put in place until April 2007. The Agency had awarded a consolatory payment of £50 in acknowledgement of its failings in respect of this in April 2007. Following our representations the Agency reimbursed £2,339.57 in respect of overpaid maintenance. It also awarded £50.00 interest and £10 in respect of communication costs.

10.4 Failure to consider financial redress

10.4.1 I am convinced that, were CSA, in line with its revised complaint handling procedures, to look critically at individual cases at the earliest point to determine whether financial redress may be appropriate, the number of cases coming to ICE

10.4.2 We have raised this issue at the most senior level within the Agency, and the Agency has assured us that complaints caseworkers have end-to-end responsibility for all aspects of resolving a case, including the proactive consideration of financial loss. Unfortunately, it has not been our experience that this happens in practice. During the year we identified 335 cases in which the question of an advance payment arose. Disappointingly almost 85% of these had not been considered for financial redress when the Agency itself had looked at the complaint. In addition, we identified 367 cases in which the question of financial loss arose. In over 83% of these cases the Agency had not considered financial redress. Regrettably, the figures below indicate that the Agency’s performance has actually deteriorated in this respect.

Cases with an advance payment/financial loss issue when the complainant came to ICE 2007/08				
Type of payment	No of cases referred to ICE	Cases where Agency did something	Cases where Agency failed to do something	% where Agency failed to do something 2006/07
Advance Payment	335	51	284	84.8%
Financial Loss	367	61	306	83.4%

11. Systemic Issues

11.1 A key role of the ICE is to act as a ‘critical friend’ to the different agencies/businesses for which we provide a service, with the objective of helping the Department to learn from complaints.

11.2 Our review of a person’s complaint about the Agency can highlight the reason why problems arose and identify a potential for other people to experience similar difficulties. The ICE raises such systemic issues at senior levels within the Agency, and is pleased to acknowledge instances where the Agency has tried to learn from past mistakes and failings, and has taken steps to improve its service to customers. The following systemic recommendations were raised with CSA during the reporting period:

- In May 2007 we identified a problem with lost Maintenance Application Forms. The Agency’s response was that it has implemented changes to its operating model following enhancements to be made to the CS2. The new organisation has resulted in more staff clearing new applications and the implementation of streamlined processes has ensured that the Agency deals more efficiently with lost and duplicate applications.
- In July 2007, we highlighted that DEO notifications can be confusing. The Agency agreed to revise the wording as part of its Client Contact Improvement Project. It has advised that clerical versions of the DEO related letters have now been re-written and delivered, and copies are now available on the intranet. The system generated notifications have also been revised and will become available at the next available system release.

- In January 2008, we highlighted that the computer system produces no alert when a qualifying child turns 16. This increases the potential for CSA to take no action to reduce the carers allowance within the maintenance assessment formula in “old rules” cases until the NRP or PWC inform the Agency of the child’s age. The Agency’s notifications provided information on what to do if a customer needs to report a change of circumstances or if they think the qualifying child is no longer applicable for child maintenance. However there is no information available to advise a customer they should inform the Agency when the child turns 16 in order to have the carers allowance adjusted. In light of this we questioned whether a sentence of this nature could be added to the notifications. The Agency has accepted this recommendation, and is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of its notices and leaflets, and has advised that the clerical ones will be implemented within the next couple of months. Those requiring system changes are being prioritised.
- In March 2008, we made proposals for the improvement of the advice given to complainants about suspended arrears. We requested that the Agency review its procedures to ensure that when arrears of maintenance are temporarily suspended, notifications are issued to customers advising them of the suspension, the reasons for it, and that once a positive liability is calculated that the arrears will be recharged to the account and collected accordingly. The Agency agrees that this recommendation would lead to improvements in customer service, and has advised that steps are being taken to amend clerical notices and leaflets. A request to amend system generated leaflets will be submitted for inclusion in a future system release.

11.3 I am also pleased to acknowledge instances when the agencies/businesses we deal with have tried to learn from past mistakes and failings, and have taken steps to improve its service to customers. CSA has provided the following examples:

- Taking proactive action to address initial CSA Bolton problems, utilising expertise in Birkenhead.
- Focusing on addressing the ICE backlog and clearing the 522 cases by 31 March.
- Focusing resource to clear outstanding ICE report recommendations.
- Joint focus between the Agency and ICE office over last 2 months to prevent the need for any cases to be exited.
- Improved working relationships between the offices at all levels - greater focus on addressing complainant concerns.
- Increasing focus on resolving cases at earliest opportunity.
- Addressing communication issues further by deciding to merge ICE teams and focal point.
- Modifying and improving its new complaints organisation and process in reaction to emerging issues.
- Improved client notifications (with more to come when Productivity Release 1 is implemented).
- Making greater use of the available enforcement powers.