

Office for Judicial Complaints



Annual Report 2008-2009





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Since drafting this report, The Office for Judicial Complaints has moved to:

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Foreword

I am very pleased to present the 2008-2009 annual report. This is the 3rd Annual Report of the Office for Judicial Complaints (OJC), but sadly my last report as Head of the OJC. I am leaving the OJC in the very near future to take up a new post.

I am proud to have been Head of the OJC since its creation on the 3rd April 2006. During this time the OJC has undergone a number of substantial changes. We have worked tirelessly towards improving the quality of service that we provide to complainants and towards increasing the transparency of the work that we complete.

This report shows that our performance has continued to improve year-on-year, in spite of an increased workload and highlights the work undertaken to provide a more open and transparent account of judicial discipline. Thanks to the decision of the Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice, to whom we are jointly responsible, the OJC now publishes the names of the judicial office-holders who have been disciplined during the year, on our website.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my three years as the Head of the OJC, and would like to thank my team for their hard work, the support they have given me and for the huge efforts they make each and every day to help our complainants through difficult, emotional and often stressful situations in a calm and professional manner.

Dale Simon
Head of the OJC







Our role

The OJC supports the Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice in their joint responsibility to maintain public confidence in members of the judiciary.

The OJC is an associated office of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). Its status, governance and operational objectives are set out in a Memorandum of Understanding between the OJC, the MoJ and the Directorate of the Judicial Offices of England and Wales. It aims to ensure that any judicial discipline matters are handled impartially, consistently and promptly.

We aim to provide a professional and independent service that is able to support the Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice in the effective and fair handling of complaints against judicial office-holders, delivered by well motivated and skilled staff. Our organisation structure appears at **ANNEX A**.

The OJC deals with complaints about the personal conduct or behaviour of a judicial office-holder, in accordance with the Judicial Discipline (Prescribed Procedures) Regulations (as amended) 2006, referred to as “the Regulations” for the remainder of this report. During 2008, amendments were made to the Regulations.

History of the OJC

Following the implementation of the Constitutional Reform Act 2005, the OJC became the sole regulatory body responsible for the investigation of matters of personal conduct and behaviour relating to judicial office-holders. Prior to the OJC being established, members of the general public could write to the Lord Chancellor or to the Judicial Correspondence Unit; however, the way the complaint was dealt with was not open or transparent, and unless requested to do so, no advice was given to complainants on how to complain.

The creation of the OJC meant that the public were, for the first time, made aware of their right to complain about the personal conduct and behaviour of judicial office-holders. Leaflets are available in every court and upon request in tribunals. A website has been created, providing information to members of the general public explaining the remit and functions of the OJC. Publications such as the annual report and business plan are made available on-line.

Judicial discipline matters are now more transparent and open and extensive information about complaints and the complaint process as a whole is now available.

The OJC still receives a large number of complaints relating to the judicial decision or judicial case management functions of judicial office-holders. These are matters that do not fall within our remit. As the judiciary is independent, complaints relating to dissatisfaction with a judicial decision or the way in which a case was managed, can only be made via the courts, by way of an appeal, dependent on any independent legal advice that the complainant may receive. The OJC tries to inform complainants, at the earliest possible opportunity, that these matters cannot be investigated.



The Judicial Complaints Process

Under the Regulations all complaints made to the OJC must be made in writing sent by post or email. If, for any reason the complainant is unable to do this, the OJC will do all they can to assist complainants with difficulties.

A complaint letter should clearly state:

- The complainant's name, address, and telephone number;
- The name of the Judicial Office Holder, court, case number and date of the hearing;
- Specific details about the complaint and wherever possible, specific instances or evidence to support the particulars of the complaint.

A printable version of the OJC's complaint form can be downloaded from the OJC web site:
www.judicialcomplaints.gov.uk

Complainants are requested to make their complaints as soon as possible. However, the regulations allow complaints to be made within twelve months of the incident. Any complaints made outside of the prescribed timeframe, may be referred to the Lord Chancellor or the Lord Chief Justice for their agreement to extend the time limit.

Consideration of complaints made where proceedings are still ongoing, are often deferred until the complainant can confirm that the case has concluded, in order to avoid any interference with court proceedings.

The OJC cannot consider any complaints about a judicial decision or how a case was managed.

Workload

Complaints received by the OJC

During 2008/2009, the OJC received a total of 1,339 complaints, a decrease of seven per cent on the 1,437 received during 2007/2008.

Magistrates and Tribunal Judicial Office Holders

There are separate procedures for dealing with complaints against Magistrates and Tribunal members.

Where a complaint is made against either a tribunal office-holder or magistrate; it is dealt with locally in the first instance, by the relevant Tribunal President or Magistrates Advisory Committee. If it is considered that disciplinary action is necessary, then the complaint will be considered by the OJC and referred to the Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice.

The table below shows the distribution of complaints in relation to different judicial office-holders.

Judicial Office Held	Number
Court of Appeal	23
High Court	81
Circuit Bench	244
Coroner	20
District Bench	539
Court of Protection	3
Magistrate	72
Tribunals (Combined) *	15
Not defined	338
Total	1,339

*Tribunal office-holders included in this category are as follows – Asylum and Immigration Tribunal, Employment Tribunal, Employment Appeals Tribunal, Mental Health Review Tribunal and Social Security and Child Support Association Tribunals.

Enquiries directed to the OJC

An enquiry is defined as any request for information or referral made to the office which does not constitute a complaint but requires a written response from the OJC.

During 2008/2009, the OJC received 720 enquires. During 2007/2008, we only received 276 enquiries. We believe this is due to the fact that there have been a number of high-profile cases that have received press publicity which the OJC's role have drawn attention of the public.



Judicial office-holders

The majority of complaints the OJC receives are against judicial office-holders sitting in County, Crown and High Courts, these include High Court Judges, Circuit Judges, Recorders, District and Deputy District Judges in County and Magistrates' Courts. Judicial office-holders in these groups are classified as mainstream judiciary, and will be referred to as such for the remainder of this report.

Complaints received about unnamed or unknown judicial office-holders

A significant number of people who contact the OJC do not know the identity of the judicial office-holder who is the subject of the complaint. In 2008-2009, 359 complaints were made which did not identify the judicial office-holder. If a complaint against an unnamed judicial office-holder does not raise issues that fall within the remit of the OJC, the complaint is dismissed without any further enquiry. Should such a complaint raise issues which do fall within the scope of our remit, all possible measures are taken to identify the judicial office-holder concerned.

The types of complaint received

As can be seen below, a high percentage of complaints are about decisions made by a judicial office-holder, which we cannot consider.

We continue to try to increase public awareness of our role by providing comprehensive information on our web site about what we can and cannot consider; by making available leaflets that provide specific information relevant to courts and tribunals and by becoming involved in local training events and other similar activities. We have also issued leaflets covering complaints about Coroners.

We do recognise that there will always be people who are so upset by the decision made in their case that they will raise their concerns in any forum in order to try and secure a different outcome and overturn a judicial decision.

The table on the next page shows the percentage of complaints we receive by type, including those which relate to judicial decisions and which therefore fall outside our remit.

Nature of Complaint	Number of Complaints	Percentage % (rounded to the nearest whole number)
Conflict of Interest	18	1
Criminal Proceedings or Convictions	6	0
Discrimination	36	3
Inappropriate Behaviour or Comments	328	24
Judicial Decision or Case Management	799	60
Miscellaneous	84	6
Misuse of Judicial Status	8	1
Motoring Offences	7	1
Not Fulfilling Judicial Duty	28	2
Professional Conduct	25	2
Total	1,339	100

Disciplinary and other action taken against judicial office-holders

The table below shows the total number of cases where the Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice have taken disciplinary and other action in the year from 1 April 2008. Press releases issued in the above cases where removal took place, and other press releases issued, can be found on the OJC's website (www.judicialcomplaints.gov.uk).

	Mainstream	Coroners	Tribunals	Magistrates	Total
Additional Training Required	1	0	0	2	3
Guidance Issued	7	0	0	0	7
Formal Advice	1	2	0	4	7
Formal Warning	0	0	1	3	4
Reprimand	3	0	1	18	22
Suspension	0	0	0	1	1
Removed from Office	2	0	5	18	25
Resigned from office during investigation	3	0	5	12	20
Total	17	2	12	58	89

The table below sets out the broad categories of behaviour which led to the Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice taking disciplinary or other action during 2008-2009.

	Additional Training	Guidance	Formal Advice	Formal Warning	Reprimand	Suspension	Removed from office	Resigned from office during investigation
Inappropriate behaviour or comments	2	6	6	3	13	0	8	6
Not fulfilling judicial duty	0	0	0	0	1	0	10	5
Misuse of judicial Status	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0
Motoring offences	1	0	0	1	6	1	2	0
Discrimination	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Criminal convictions	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	7
Findings of professional misconduct	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1
Total	3	7	7	4	22	1	25	20

Judicial Office Held	Number of Complaints Received	Number of Judicial Office-Holders Subject to Disciplinary Action	Percentage % (rounded to nearest whole number)
Mainstream	870	18	2
Coroners	18	4	22
Tribunal	18	12	67
Magistrate	62	61	98



Case studies

The following case studies represent examples of behaviour which have or would have led to disciplinary action being taken against a judicial office-holder.

Case Study One

An Advisory Committee conducted an investigation into a magistrate who had received fines and fixed penalties on three occasions between 2005 and 2008. The magistrate in question informed the Justices' Clerk promptly on each occasion. The offences were for speeding and going through a red light.

The Advisory Committee recommended that the magistrate be reprimanded. The case was then considered by the Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice, who agreed with the Advisory Committee.

The magistrate was reprimanded and informed that the reprimand will be held on file and may be referred to in any future disciplinary proceedings.

Case Study Two

A member of the Mental Health Review Tribunal was convicted of driving with excess alcohol in their bloodstream. The person concerned was fined and disqualified from driving for 12 months. Up until this time the individual had provided an excellent service and agreed not to sit whilst the investigation took place.

The tribunal concerned conducted an investigation, with the final report by the head of the tribunal recommending, to the Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice, removal of the judicial office-holder from office.

The Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice agreed with the recommendation and wrote to the person concerned informing them that they had made a preliminary decision to remove them from office and that they had 20 days in which to make any representations against removal from office. On receipt of the letter the person concerned resigned from office, rather than be removed.



Case Study Three

In the course of considering another matter, the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chief Justice expressed concern about the conduct of a coroner and exercised their powers under Regulation 13 (1) of the Judicial Discipline (Prescribed Procedures) Regulations 2006 (as amended) and to direct the OJC to investigate their concerns.

An explanation was sought from the coroner about delays and apparent insensitivity shown in relation to whether an inquest should be held in a particular case. In response the Coroner demonstrated clear acceptance that, on this occasion, their conduct had fallen short of the standard to be expected. Guidance on the appropriate way forward was then sought from the Nominated Judge.

As this appeared to be an isolated incident and given that the coroner had accepted responsibility, the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chief Justice decided that formal advice was the appropriate disciplinary sanction and the Lord Chief Justice wrote to the coroner to this effect stating that a record of the disciplinary action would be held on file and referred to in any future proceedings.

Case Study Four

During the course of a murder trial, it was revealed that the accused (who was found guilty), had acted in revenge after discovering his wife had an affair with a Deputy District Judge. They had met through a contact website; on which the judge appeared naked. The OJC brought the case to the attention of a Nominated Judge asking for advice. As a result further questions were asked about the advert that the judge put on the website.

After consideration of the advice received from the Nominated Judge, it was felt by the Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice, that although the behaviour of the judge occurred in his private life, his actions had brought the judiciary into disrepute. He was therefore informed that it was proposed to remove him from office.

On receipt of this information, the judge made some representations against the proposed course of action, but when these were dismissed by the Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice he then resigned from office.

Review Bodies

What they do

Review bodies were established under the regulations to provide judicial office-holders with a form of appeal, against the chosen course of action recommended by the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chief Justice. The Review Body is an impartial group of people who have had no input in the previous findings in the disciplinary investigation process.

A Review Body consists of;

- A judicial office-holder of a higher judicial position than the subject of the disciplinary proceedings;
- A judicial office-holder of the same judicial rank as the subject of the disciplinary proceeding; and
- Two lay members, neither of whom has been a judicial office-holder or a practising lawyer. All lay members were recruited by way of a fair and open competition.

Review Body cases may be heard over a number of weeks, especially where interviews are required. Review Bodies have freedom to look into any aspect of the complaint and the disciplinary action proposed, therefore, it is not unusual for them to make recommendations that deal with other aspects of a complaint such as procedures and processes, or identify training needs. The majority of Review Bodies are convened to decide on magistrates' disciplinary matters.

A Review Body will convene for the following reasons:

- Where the Nominated Judge considers that the request for a Review Body is 'not totally without merit';
- The Lord Chief Justice or Lord Chancellor feel that there are shortcomings in the initial investigation;
- The Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman (JACO) decides to refer the findings of a judicial investigation to a Review Body; and
- The Ombudsman sets aside a determination made in a case and directs that the case is to be referred to a Review Body.

The table below shows the number of Review Bodies that were active during this period, for each judicial group:

	No. of Review Bodies
Mainstream	3
Magistrate	12
Tribunal	1
Coroner	0

Of the 16 Review Bodies that took place during the reporting period, 14 have concluded.

The table below shows the outcome of the 14 cases, for each judicial group;

	Mainstream	Magistrate	Tribunal
Formal advice	0	0	0
Formal warning	0	1	0
Reprimand	1	3	0
Removed from office	2	3	1
Resigned from office during investigation	0	3	0
Total	3	10	1

Of the cases that concluded, the Review Body upheld the original recommendation in 11 of the cases, recommended a lesser sanction in three cases, and recommended a higher sanction in none of the cases.

The Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice agreed with the Review Body's recommendation in all of the cases during this period. In accordance with Regulation 26(2) of the Regulations, the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chief Justice cannot impose a sanction more severe than that recommended by the review body and they are bound by any findings of fact made by the review body.



Improving the services we provide

This year has seen major change taken place in the OJC as we have successfully implemented a reorganisation of our staff and processes. The senior management team realised the need to create a more responsive service that provided better value for money and one that could cope with an increasing caseload. We have reduced the timescale for dealing with many matters significantly.

The reorganisation has proved to be a success, with new staff and procedures bedding in, we have been able to cope with increased workloads, whilst improving performance in key areas. During this period the Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman undertook an audit of the OJC at the request of the Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice, in accordance with S.113 of the Constitutional Reform Act 2005. In conducting the audit, the JACO Audit Team looked at a sample of cases considered by the OJC, both before and after its recent reorganisation. This audit confirms that the changes have led to service improvement. As reported in the Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman's annual report for this year:

'The audit presents a positive picture of the OJC. It does not indicate that there is a significant body of people with valid complaints about the OJC's processes who do not pursue matters with me, or that people who do not pursue matters might have more valid concerns about the process followed than those who do submit a second tier complaint; in particular there was little evidence (and none in the more recent cases considered) of the OJC simply preferring the view of the Judicial Office Holder complained about in respect of a judicial conduct matter without seeking appropriate independent verification. It also shows that, whereas there were problems with the OJC's management and administration of cases, the recent OJC reorganisation is delivering significant improvements.'

Website

We have designed new interactive forms for our website, which will be available in the coming financial year.

Information Assurance

We ensure that the information in our care is kept in a safe environment.

To do this, only staff who work for the OJC have access to our files. Any documentation that is moved from the office is transported in sealed cases or by secure delivery systems.

Our IT system is also accredited and secure.

Learning from others: Cross-border relationships

Over the last year we have continued to establish links with organisations in other countries who perform a similar function to ourselves. We use these links to learn more about the systems and processes that they use and incorporate lessons learned from these organisations into our own practices. We hope that others are also able to introduce improvements to their own systems as a result of our discussion.

We have been involved in an international conference in the United States of America and provided advice to other jurisdictions in the handling of judicial complaints.



A delegation from the Turkish judiciary on a visit to the OJC headquarters

Complainants

We are now consulting a sample of the people who have contacted our office in the last year to find out what they thought of the service we provided.

Many complainants are frustrated because it is not within our remit to give them the outcome they want, which is to overturn a decision, which is not within our remit, so their complaint about the judicial decision is dismissed. However, we will be able to obtain valuable information from complainants, about their view of our speed, quality and efficiency of complaints handling.

One of the key findings from our last questionnaire we sent to complainants identified that some of our complainants suffered from a mental disability. In order to ensure that staff are properly equipped to deal with these complainants, training was arranged with the Mental Health Foundation. The training received helped us to understand the communication problems faced by some complainants, and will help us to ensure that valid complaints about Judicial office holders are not lost because of an individual's disability.

We hope that our current questionnaire will provide us with more information which will lead to improvements in the service we provide.



Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman

Sir John Brigstocke KCB was appointed as the Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman with effect from 3 April 2006. His post was created under section 62 of the Constitutional Reform Act 2005 to cover, in part, consideration of the way in which the OJC carries out its functions under the Judicial Discipline (Proscribed procedures) Regulations 2006, amendments 2008, and supporting rules, to ensure that there is no evidence of maladministration within the OJC.

We aim to provide all of our complainants with an efficient and professional service; however should you have a complaint or query about our handling of your complaint, you should address your complaint to this office in the first instance.

If we are unable to resolve your complaint successfully, you may then wish to contact the Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman (JACO), who can investigate complaints about the handling of matters involving judicial discipline or conduct.

Further information about the role and authority of the Ombudsman and the performance of his office is available from their website or by writing to the below address:

Office of the Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman
9th Floor
The Tower
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

www.judicialombudsman.gov.uk



Key Performance Indicators

Our 2008-2009 Corporate and Business Plan identified a number of key aims for the OJC.

- To provide timely, consistent, transparent service and correct information to all complainants;
- To continually improve our service by ensuring all of our staff have the required knowledge and skills;
- To ensure that all complaints and conduct matters are dealt with in accordance with the timescales and procedures laid down in the regulations;
- To provide a quality support service to all Judges involved in the consideration of complaints and conduct;
- To facilitate Review Bodies, providing support to all Review Body members and the people that they are dealing with;
- To review our internal processes and resources throughout 2008 - 2009, to ensure the most efficient and effective service delivery; and
- To seek feedback from our complainants at appropriate times in order to develop and improve our service.

With these aims in mind we established a series of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's), to measure our performance throughout the year. The following pages detail how we have performed against these indicators over the course of the last financial year.

PT 1 – To further promote awareness and understanding of the role and responsibilities of the OJC by 31 March 2009.

	KPI	Target	OJC Performance
1.1	To review all of our leaflets to ensure that they are user friendly	To conduct a review of our leaflets, incorporating input from our 'Critical Friends' group, by 1 November 2008	We have asked our Critical Friends for feedback on our current leaflets. This information is now being analysed and will be included when our leaflets are redrafted next year

PT 2 – To provide a timely, consistent, transparent and informative service to all users.

	KPI	Target	OJC Performance
2.1	Provide a prompt service to users.	<p>Provide a prompt service to users, meeting targets as set down in the regulations;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledge letters and emails within 2 working days of receipt. Decide whether a complaint falls within the remit of the OJC, and inform the complainant of how their case will be dealt with, or why we cannot deal with it, within 15 working days of receipt. Keep all parties involved in a complaint informed of progress on a monthly basis, or as appropriate in the individual circumstances of a long standing complainant. All parties are informed of the outcome of a complaint within 90 working days of a complaint being received (subject to external factors beyond the control of the OJC) Case papers provided to the Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman within 5 working days of a request being received 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 88.7% of all letters and emails received by the OJC were acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt, a large improvement on 79% achieved last year. The OJC met this target in 79.5% of cases throughout the reporting period. 67% of parties were kept informed of the progress of their case or case that they were involved in. This is a slight improvement from last year . The OJC met this target in 86% of cases, an improvement on the 79% we achieved last year. 91.5% of case papers were sent to JACO within 5 working days. This is the first time we have reported against this target.
2.2	Provide a professional service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that staff have the skills needed to deal with complaints effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff received training in writing skills and Mental Health awareness.

PT 3 – Ensuring that all complaints and conduct matters are dealt with in accordance with the timescales and procedures laid down in the regulations.

	Key Activity	Target	Progress
3.1	Review our casework manual and update as necessary	Revisions completed by 1 June 2008	The Casework operations manual is complete and staff training is ongoing. New additions are made as needed.

PT 4 – To continue to improve our processes, building on the lessons learned over the past year.

	Key Activity	Target	Progress
4.1	To create a FOI/PQ database to ensure consistency in the manner in which we deal with FOI requests and PQ's.	1 October 2008	A folder of precedents has been prepared.
4.2	A section dealing with Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) will be added to our web site.	1 December 2008	Work continues on this item.
4.3	Conduct a staff satisfaction survey and implement appropriate changes to address any concerns arising from the survey	1 March 2009	This has been postponed until after the appointment of a new Head of the OJC
4.4	Introduce operational standards for the business	1 March 2009	Target met.

PT 5 – To obtain more information concerning the diversity of our clients and use that information to improve the service that we provide.

	Key Activity	Target	Progress
5.1	To conduct a further customer survey.	1 March 2009	The questionnaire has been sent to clients and will be evaluated in the coming year.
5.2	To analyse and make use of the information provided by the implementation of the feedback forms available on our web site.		Although all work has been completed by the OJC, subsequent technical delays have occurred. This will be implemented in the coming year.
5.3	To make contact with organisations representing the interests of people suffering with mental health issues to seek advice into how we might improve the service we provide to our customers.	1 March 2009	Complete. Training has taken place.

PT 6 – To measure the cost-effectiveness of our performance.

	Key Activity	Target	Progress
6.1	Implement a system of unit costs based on the work undertaken in the previous year to establish a rigorous unit costing system	1 August 2008	System designed and implemented.

PT 7 – To measure our performance in the way that we handle Review Body cases.

	Key Activity	Target	Progress
7.1	To provide Review Body members with all relevant case papers in sufficient time to allow adequate time for consideration prior to hearings	Provide papers at least 5 working days in advance of the first meeting of a Review Body.	Targets currently being met.
7.2	Improve communication with Review Body Lay Members by way of newsletter and the creation of a secure discussion forum on our web site.	Produce twice yearly newsletter for distribution to all Lay Members and implement changes to web site by 1st January 2009.	Lay Members are being regularly updated.
7.3	Provide regular updates to interested parties on the progress of Review Bodies.	Provide monthly updates to relevant parties.	Targets currently being met.

Financial information and Human Resources

Expenditure Statement

As an associated office of the MoJ, the OJC is not required to produce its own accounts; however, our expenditure is an integral part of the MoJ's Resource Accounts, which are subject to audit.

We are committed to managing our resources efficiently and have in place sound financial governance systems.

An analysis of our budget for the year ending 31 March 2009 is set out below.

Human Resources

	Amount
Paybill	£700,701.67
Other Running Costs	£187,674.40
Total	£888,376.07

Sick Absence

The MoJ target for sick absence is 7.5 days per person. The OJC's average is 12.25 days per person per year, however this performance has been affected by one member of staff being on long term sick leave.

Our performance without long term sick leave is 5.03 days per person per year.

Staff training and Development

Our staff have undergone a significant amount of induction training during this year due to the restructure, this has included visits to a County, Crown and Magistrates' Court, to allow staff to familiarise themselves with court procedures and gain a better understanding of the situations which our complainants describe to us. The casework team also visited a regional Judicial Secretariat office to gain knowledge of how they run their office.


One of the significant parts of the OJC's work involves taking telephone calls from irate complainants. As part of their induction training the new members of staff attended a in-house training session to address this area of work.

We have also trained our staff in professional writing skills as well as Information Assurance where two of our staff have obtained the Certificate for Information Security Management Principles, so that they can ensure that information is kept in a safe environment.

Staff also undertook training organised by the Mental Health Foundation.

As an organisation we actively participate in the MoJ's Diversity programme. We have trained staff in, and prepared, Equality Impact Assessments, which enables managers to assess whether changes made within the workplace have a specific impact upon any particular group. This has been particularly important in view of the operational changes that we have made.

We have ensured that we give particular emphasis to diversity matters when developing our policies to ensure that they take into account all sections of society. We pride ourselves on developing all of our employees to their



maximum potential, making the best use of their varied talents. Last year we reviewed the changes made to our structure to ensure that we had fully considered diversity and equality issues and were not disadvantaging our complainants.

A new member of staff is now involved in diversity issues and we hope to be able to obtain further information from our complainants, when changes to our web site go live and the result of our questionnaire have been evaluated.

Complainant Feedback and Critical Friends

We continue to use our critical friends to review and comment on the service we provide. At present, membership of the group consists of members drawn from all areas of the judiciary as well as a representative who is able to advise on issues relating to visual impairment. We had hoped to expand this group, but will not do so until we are ready to issue new documents to the public such as our leaflets or the content of our website.

Our organisation

