

## Summary Report of the Independent Assessors 2016

### Caseload and Findings

We cleared 149 cases in 2016, averaging 12.4 per month which was four more per month than the preceding period. Most complaints were made up of multiple separate elements which we adjudicated upon individually, considering around 710 separate elements in total.

The complaints covered a wide range of issues, but the most frequently upheld elements were:

- Communication shortfalls (17% of elements upheld)
- Delay (13% of elements upheld),
- Inaccuracy or error (7% of elements upheld)
- Process errors (6% of elements upheld)

We saw fewer **Remedy Implementation** and **IT** related issues than last year, although some of both still arose.

Of the cases we considered in the year, we didn't uphold any part of only 7% of them. In over half of the cases we reviewed we increased the consolatory payment (often as we found additional maladministration), most frequently by £50 or less. Our highest award in addition to that already made by OS this year was £150.

### Issues we cannot consider

Our Terms of Reference only cover complaints about OS' service or administration and we are unable to consider the Investigation or the Ombudsman's findings. We see many complaints about the refusal to transfer a telephone call to a manager and also refusal to transfer a service complaint call to Customer Relations. We never uphold these complaints as OS operational policy is to provide call backs to these requests, but they are both significant annoyances for complainants.

### Issues arising from Cases

Our observations are from a relatively small number of sometimes complex complaints, and should be seen in the context of the total volume of cases OS deals with. The majority of the complaints we consider arise from service problems that OS are working to improve including delay, poor communications and administrative and process errors.

We have given other specific feedback on cases to OS including:

- Responses promised from the investigation team be delivered;
- Consideration of operational policy changes;
- Referral for Ombudsman review or that a provider case be re-opened where findings are in doubt due to process/service issues;
- Clarification of processes in staff training; and
- Amendment of the website.

We have also drawn out the following broader issues for OS to consider:

**Explanation** - complainants can feel there is a lack of explanation of findings. Sometimes facts are provided without a narrative that links back to the complainant's concerns. At other times there appears a wish to avoid confrontation and so failure to clearly engage with the points a complainant is making, leaving complainants unclear or feeling that they haven't been answered.

**Reasonable adjustment** - is a factor in only a small number of cases but is difficult to get right and merits further consideration.

**Communication failures and Delay** – are common and account for 30% of the elements of complaint that we have upheld.

**The Unacceptable Actions Policy (UAP)** - we have rarely considered that the UAP has been invoked inappropriately. There have been issues with the application of the UAP in particular cases, sometimes interlinked with issues of reasonable adjustment, and we have made recommendation that the policy be reviewed.

## **Conclusion**

We hope our work helps complainants to get some resolution to their concerns and we are grateful for their feedback on what we do for them and that our findings and feedback to OS support continued service improvement.

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