

COMPENSATION AGENCY

A follow-up review
of the inspection
recommendations

June 2007

Criminal Justice Inspection
Northern Ireland
a better justice system for all





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List of abbreviations

APIL	Association of Personal Injury Lawyers
CICAP	Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel
CJI	Criminal Justice Inspection
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management
NICtS	Northern Ireland Court Service
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
NIPSA	Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
VSNI	Victim Support Northern Ireland



Chief Inspector's Foreword

This review reports on progress in implementing the recommendations made by Criminal Justice Inspection (CJI) following the inspection of the Compensation Agency in September 2005.

The review was guided by the action plan agreed with the Compensation Agency which was published as an appendix to the inspection report in January 2006.

The follow-up review confirms that the Compensation Agency continues to deliver a valuable and necessary service to victims of violent crime. The Agency is continuing to review its staffing and accommodation needs commensurate with the run down of the 1988 Order Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme and the decreasing number of claims under the Terrorism Act.

The Agency has successfully reduced the numbers of 1988 Order claims to less than 1200, with a target to reduce by a further 500 by the end of the 2007-2008 business year. Staff numbers have reduced from 110 at the time of the initial inspection to the current level of 79. The Agency is to be given considerable credit for achieving its targets against this backdrop.

There have been a number of changes to the senior management of the Agency since the original inspection and this has limited progress on some of the recommendations. The new Chief Executive is committed to developing corporate services within the Agency and fully accepts the need to develop strategic relationships, particularly with the PSNI.

I am confident that the Agency will continue to deliver an essential service to very high standards and that it will remain an interesting and challenging place to work.

The inspection team appreciated the co-operation it received from the Compensation Agency in undertaking this review.

Kit Chivers

Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland.

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Follow-up review

CHAPTER 1:

Introduction

The Compensation Agency was inspected by Criminal Justice Inspection (CJI) in September 2005 and a report was published in January 2006. The report contained 10 recommendations. An action plan prepared by the Agency which set out tasks, lead responsibility and a timeframe for each of the recommendations, was published as an appendix to the report. It was agreed that a review of progress against each of the recommendations and agreed tasks would be undertaken by CJI after 12 months from the report's publication.

All recommendations are graded 'achieved' or 'not achieved' based on progress in implementing the agreed tasks and taking account of the published timeframe.

Progress on recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Agency should develop a more accessible management information report using charts and graphs.

Action:

A preliminary move to produce more pictorial management information for Ministerial Submission has already been introduced. A full review of the current Management Information Reports will be carried out to identify the amount and format of management information required to support the monitoring of Key Performance Targets.

Status: Achieved

Monthly management information reports to the Agency Strategy Group are in much the same format as before, however there are now elements of colour and graphical additions. Charts are now used to help inform discussion at the quarterly review meetings with the NIO.

Recommendation 2

The Agency should extend the use of new technology to accepting the electronic transfer of completed claim forms.

Actions:

The IT link to facilitate electronic transfer of forms between the Agency and Victim Support Northern Ireland (VSNI) should be completed by March 2006. The Agency will carry out a review of the lessons learned and consider how this technology could be extended further.

Status: Not Achieved

IT security issues with the NIO information system OASIS have caused difficulties in progressing the VSNI link. This is a real frustration for VSNI who would prefer that there is an acknowledgement that it is not going to happen and should drop off the agenda rather than creating false expectations. The Agency however has invested a great deal of time and approx £20,000 in trying to take this forward and are determined to achieve some return on their investment. They are currently seeking a technical solution which can satisfy the security concerns.

In addition the new Chief Executive intends to conduct a review of the Agency's website in 2007-08 and part of this will consider on-line applications, available to VSNI and to the public at large.



Recommendation 3

The Agency should develop a more formal communication process with its major stakeholders.

Action:

The Agency will prepare and implement a communication strategy with major stakeholders.

Status: Achieved

The Agency has put in place arrangements for twice-yearly formal meetings with VSNI and the Criminal Injury Claims Appeals Panel (CICAP) with additional discussions taking place as required.

Recommendation 4

The Agency should develop a performance target to reinforce the importance of complaint investigation.

Action:

The Agency recognises the importance of complaint investigation and has a robust system already in place. A performance target will be included in future Business Plans. This recommendation will be included as part of the Business Planning Process and will link with Recommendation No 6.

Status: Achieved

A review of the Agency's complaints/compliments procedures has been conducted in 2006-07. In the 2007-08 draft Business Plan a Ministerial target on the timely consideration of complaints has been included.

Recommendation 5

The Agency should develop stronger strategic links with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) so that both organisations are fully aware of the impact of ongoing change and that police officers remain a key support to helping it decide on the legitimacy of claims.

Action:

The Agency recognises the importance of a strategic link with the PSNI and the requirement for mutual support within the operational capability of the Agency. The Agency will consult with the PSNI to draw up and implement a plan to facilitate a mutual understanding of operational processes and requirements.

Status: Not Achieved

It is disappointing to find that this link has not been established, especially since the delay in getting police reports has a direct impact on much of the work of the Agency. Inspectors understand that the changes within the PSNI are such that it is difficult to have continuity at a strategic level, however the benefits for the Agency could be considerable. The Agency's letters to the PSNI requesting reports now emphasise the Agency's target on decisions on tariff claims and the time-frame agreed with the PSNI. The Business Plan for 2007-08 includes establishing a Service Level Agreement with the PSNI. It aims to establish more formal links at a strategic level alongside that exercise, and to explore the value of further presentations to local police District Command Units and the potential for presentations to new recruits. This is clearly on the Chief Executive's agenda and progress is anticipated in the near future.



Recommendation 6

The Agency should be consulting its partners in the criminal justice system before preparing Business and Corporate plans.

Action:

The Agency considers that the Framework Document allows little or no scope for stakeholders to influence Business or Corporate plans. However, as part of the Business Planning process, it plans to invite key stakeholders to a consultation exercise on the proposed three-year Corporate Plan 2006-09 and annual Business Plan 2006-07 in March 2006 by way of a facilitated meeting.

Status: Achieved

The Agency conducted a successful consultation event in 2006 when preparing the three-year Corporate Plan. Consultation has taken place with a number of stakeholders on drafts of the 2006-07 and 2007-08 Business Plans. The consultation included the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL), Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) along with the PSNI, Northern Ireland Court Service, CICAP, VSNI and the Victims' Unit.

Recommendation 7

The Agency needs to develop new relationships with those organisations representing minority groups.

Action:

The Agency has contacted the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) in relation to advice regarding translations for Guidance Notes. Work is ongoing in relation to publication and dissemination of such translations. The Agency will develop an outreach strategy.

Status: Not Achieved

The Agency continues to translate offer letters and makes use of interpreters as appropriate. In terms of outreach, the Agency has held discussions with VSNI to establish ways of ensuring that relevant representative groups have the information to signpost potential applicants. The limited progress in this area highlights the need for the Agency to develop an outreach strategy. Disability awareness training is being scheduled for staff for the 2007-08 year.





Recommendation 8

The Agency should action the recommendation contained in the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) assessment by comparing itself to external organisations.

Action:

The Agency proposes to carry out a benchmarking exercise during the Business Year 2006-07.

Status: Not Achieved

The Agency did not conduct the proposed benchmarking exercise in 2006-07, however the new Chief Executive and Head of Operations can see merit in taking it forward this year and plan to visit the Criminal Injury Claims Authority (CICA) (GB) in the next few weeks to establish whether comparisons with their operation can be drawn.

Recommendation 9

The Agency should conduct a cost benefit analysis of its training plan.

Action:

While the Agency already evaluates the benefit of training undertaken by staff, it recognises the need to carry out a more in-depth analysis.

The Agency proposes to initially put in place the systems which will support this and will carry out pilot cost benefit analyses during the first six months of the financial year 2006-07. A full cost benefit analysis of training will be carried out in future years.

Status: Not Achieved

The senior member of the management team with responsibility for training has been on long term sick leave and little progress has been made since the inspection. The new management structure within the Agency places training under the control of the Head of Corporate Services. A basic analysis of feedback from training is being carried out for 2006-07. More robust procedures on training evaluation are being put in place for 2007-08. The Agency has also considered its overall skills needs as part of the 2007-08 training plan.



Recommendation 10

Staff should be encouraged to use external e-mail in its dealing with customers and stakeholders.

Action:

The Agency will carry out a review into the use of e-mail in respect of this recommendation and identify and implement any suitable progress in this regard.

Status: Achieved

Staff members are now actively encouraged to use e-mail as an effective method of communication. It has proved particularly useful in arranging consultations and court dates with claimants, their representatives and the NICtS.

Conclusions

Since the original inspection, there have been two changes of Chief Executive and a new Head of Operations has been appointed. Although only five of the 10 recommendations have been achieved, it is clear that these outstanding recommendations are still on the Compensation Agency's agenda and there is a commitment from the current management team that they will be pursued during the course of the business year. It is hoped that the Agency can now enjoy some stability at a strategic level to prepare for the changes that will inevitably come.

The Agency still tends to take a rather insular view of the world and focuses very much on the job in hand to the detriment of the strategic relationship that should exist between the Agency and the PSNI. The new Chief Executive and Head of Operations have acknowledged this as a key priority.

It is also clear that in the current fiscal environment, there is increasing pressure for the Agency to do more with less. A more normal society will not need the same number of compensation schemes and Treasury pressure to reduce expenditure will be an issue for the Assembly.

The Compensation Agency remains a good place to work and staff satisfaction levels are still very high. Senior management are alert to the fears of under-resourcing some areas of the business, and would like to develop more flexibility with staff moving between schemes to cover increases of claims or staff absence.

The Agency has much to be proud about in continuing to achieve Charter Mark and IIP Accreditation in the midst of the downsizing programme. The Chief Executive has initiated a series of lunchtime get-togethers with staff from all grades and departments to maintain and develop internal communication – this is to be encouraged as it is the most positive way of articulating the Agency's vision and future direction.