

## Independent Complaint Reviewers Annual Report 2009-2010



Jodi Berg and Elizabeth Derrington are the Independent Complaints Reviewers (ICRs) for the Youth Justice Agency. Mrs Berg has qualifications as a solicitor, a mediator, and a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators, and Ms Derrington as a solicitor and mediator. Their service is free to people unhappy with the answers they have received to their complaints from the Youth Justice Agency.

The ICRs review complaints about 8 public bodies. Team members are skilled complaint handlers who respond to all contact in an efficient and courteous way. We have video links with the Agency so that young people or their representatives can speak with us face to face quickly. Our leaflet *Seeking a Fair Resolution* is available on our website at [www.icrev.org.uk](http://www.icrev.org.uk) or from the Youth Justice Agency.

### Foreword

Elizabeth Derrington and I are pleased to present our annual report as ICRs for the Youth Justice Agency, which provides both community and custodial services for young people. For the most part it does so without incident or cause for complaint. However things can go wrong and, if this happens, the Agency needs robust internal systems to address concerns. When complaints cannot be resolved, it is important to give people the opportunity to have their complaints reviewed by someone independent and impartial, who can look into what happened and give an objective decision about whether their complaint is justified.

ICR review will consider what kind of service people can reasonably expect from the Agency and whether required standards were met in their case. We do this by offering advice and assistance to help people take matters forward; by agreeing steps to be taken by the Agency that will satisfy both parties; or through adjudication, following investigation. We are able to bring a fresh perspective to the issues and, if the complaint is justified, to recommend redress for the complainant, or improvements to the Agency's service.

As part of our role, we visit the Agency during the year to check on the quality of its internal complaints procedures and adherence to them. Following my visits in this reporting year, I remain impressed with the quality of service I see and that is reported to me by young people and their families. Complaints procedures are well understood throughout the Agency and complaints are valued for the light they shed on the quality of the Agency's service to young people. We are satisfied that the complaints process is effectively communicated to young people and that Agency staff take complaints seriously.

### The reporting year

During the year, the Agency recorded 20 internal complaints. Of these 10 were resolved at step 1 ("talk to a member of staff"), and 10 at step 2 ("complain to a senior manager"). No complaints were referred to the Chief Executive (step 3) or the ICR office (step 4). As always, the majority of complaints (18) were made about Custodial Services, however numbers remain very low given the extent and type of contact Agency staff have with clients and their families, which can potentially create situations of conflict. This demonstrates that people are generally satisfied with the Agency's service and gets with the personal reports we get from young people and their family members.

Although we received no formal referrals from complainants during the reporting year, I received internal complaints data and carried out visits to regional offices and to the Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre. I met with a cross section of Agency staff and stakeholders, including parents of young people with whom

the Agency was working and a member of the judiciary. Importantly, I held unsupervised meetings with young offenders and voluntary users of the service. Young people clearly felt able to speak openly to me and were very positive about the Agency and its staff. Their reported experience adds to my own evaluation of the quality of Agency services and the effectiveness of the Agency's complaints procedures. I am most grateful to everyone I met for their frank responses to questions.

Overall, I am satisfied that the Agency's complaints process is well-established and successfully operated. I note that the Agency uses easy to understand complaints leaflets and also explains complaints procedures to young people on induction to the service. Complaints are taken seriously at the highest Agency level and complaint information is considered quarterly at Board level. This year I made two recommendations to the Agency following my visits. The first was that young people should be informed about the independent ICR service on induction, and the second that management complaint reports to the Board should include both qualitative information about the nature of complaint referrals and evidence of lessons learned. I am pleased to report that both were accepted and are being implemented. As always, I will check on progress this year.

I am aware that the Criminal Justice Inspection Service has previously raised concerns that young people may be reluctant to complain because they could not do so confidentially. I did not find evidence of this on my visits. Young people knew how to raise complaints with Agency staff and staff members I met understood the complaints procedures and appeared willing to help young people to discuss issues and concerns in confidence. I note here that most complaints made at Woodlands were resolved at the Centre, but only after referral to a senior manager, which shows that young people are willing to raise their complaints to a higher level when the need arises. Nevertheless, following my recommendation, I hope that the emphasis to be placed on the independence of the ICR role at induction will go some way to providing reassurance.

Finally, I record our thanks to the Agency Board and senior managers for their continuing support for the ICR role. In particular, I thank the outgoing Chief Executive, Dr Bill Lockhart, for the facilitative way he has worked with our office and the example that he set to Agency staff in treating complaints seriously and seeking to learn from them. We look forward to working with the Agency in the coming year.

Jodi Berg

### **Contact the ICR team**

Anybody who contacts the office can expect from the team:

Courtesy	A polite and interested response
Honesty	A frank and open response to enquiries
Respect	A serious and considerate attitude
Objectivity	An independent and unbiased approach
Flexibility	Willingness to respond to people's needs
Plain language	Straightforward and simple communication

We treat everyone with fairness and sensitivity, and recognise how difficult it can be to complain about people in positions of authority. We work to high standards recommended by the British and Irish Ombudsman Association and have been awarded the BSI complaints management standard.

We respect the privacy of complainants and do not publish information about them or their case, or discuss individual cases with any third party. We are able to see all of the Agency's files and information in order to investigate a complaint but have no authority to release any of this to anyone else, including the person making the complaint. Requests for data or information must be made direct to the Agency.

Contact us at:

New Premier House, 150 Southampton Row, London WC1B 5AL

e-mail: [enquiries@icr.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@icr.gsi.gov.uk) telephone: 020 7278 6251 fax: 020 7278 9675