

PRESS RELEASE

Ombudsman's Annual Report reveals 55 per cent increase in enquiries resolved

In her 2009-10 Annual Report, *Making an impact*, Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman Ann Abraham has revealed a 55 per cent increase in the number of enquiries resolved by her Office in the last year. Published today, the report shows that between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2010, her Office resolved more than 24,000 enquiries, helping thousands of members of the public who felt they had been mistreated or suffered poor service at the hands of public services.

The closure of the Healthcare Commission on 31 March 2009 means the Ombudsman is now the second and final point of contact for anyone who wishes to make a complaint about the NHS in England. It is a simpler and faster system for the public, and as the Ombudsman explains in her report, the positive impact of this is already apparent. The transition has been smooth, with the Ombudsman's Office successfully dealing with a significant increase in the number of health complaints received in 2009-10 - a total of 14,429, compared to 6,780 complaints in 2008-09.

At the same time, the number of complaints about parliamentary bodies has increased from 7,990 in 2008-2009 to 8,543 in the last year. The report also reveals the five government departments which have generated the greatest number of complaints: the Department for Work and Pensions, HM Revenue & Customs, the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Transport.

Ann Abraham also uses her Annual Report to affirm her commitment to making the system for parliamentary complaints more straightforward. Currently, anyone wishing to make a complaint to the Ombudsman about a parliamentary body must have it referred by a Member of Parliament. This is not necessary for health complaints. The report reveals that 235 complaints were withdrawn last year because the complainant did not get an MP referral, illustrating how this 'MP filter' can impede access to the

Ombudsman for some. The Ombudsman will be seeking a range of views on this issue in the coming months.

In her report, the Ombudsman also shares the stories of some of the people her Office has helped during the last year. Among these are examples of complaints which have been successfully resolved through 'intervention', avoiding the need for a full, and more lengthy, formal investigation. Last year, 321 enquiries were resolved this way - more than double the number in the previous year.

Looking forward to the months ahead, Ann Abraham also warns that poor administration and customer service by public services can be an unnecessary drain on the public purse:

"It is evident that the delivery of good administration will be vital to the effective provision of public services in a straitened fiscal environment. My Office has a crucial role to play in helping Parliament hold public services to account in these areas and in highlighting areas for improvement. Poor customer service and maladministration wastes time and money. To ensure best value from limited resources, public bodies will need to get it right first time by focusing on their customers, acting fairly and transparently and seeking continuous improvement."

Ends

Notes for Editors

1. The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's 2009-10 Annual Report, *Making an impact*, was laid before Parliament on 14 July and is [available here](#), together with the Ombudsman's Resource Accounts 2009-10.
2. Ann Abraham holds the post of UK Parliamentary Ombudsman and is also Health Service Ombudsman for England. She is appointed by the Crown and is completely independent of Government and the NHS. Her role is to provide a service to the public by undertaking independent investigations into complaints that government departments, a range of other public bodies in the UK, and the NHS in England, have not acted properly or fairly or have provided a poor service. There is no charge for using the Ombudsman's services.
3. For media enquiries, please call 0300 061 3924 or email Katherine.butler@ombudsman.org.uk.