

Performance Pledges

Our performance pledges were made in 1997 and have not been revised since. The Honourable Member is correct in pointing out that in 2006 we have not met the target of processing within 10 working days, 70% of cases Outside Jurisdiction (“OJ”) or Under Restriction. This can be attributed to a number of factors, detailed below:

- (a) **Caseload.** Complaints have increased steadily over the years: from 3073 in 1997/98, the year in which the performance pledge was introduced, to 4266 in 2005/06. The total number received in the first seven months of 2006/07, i.e., 3124, already exceeds the total received in 1997/98. This has created considerable pressure on our Assessment Team, tasked to assess thoroughly and accurately all incoming cases in determining whether they should be investigated.
- (b) **Providing Reasons.** Previously, at the time when the performance pledges were made and for some time afterwards, we adopted a “template” approach when telling complainants that their complaints were not taken up for reasons of OJ or Restrictions. We now take an individualized, communicative and transparent approach in explaining the reasons why we do not pursue a complaint. Consequently, this takes up much more processing time.
- (c) **Complexity of cases.** An increasing number of cases involve multiple issues, some within and others outside our jurisdiction. As these issues are sometimes interrelated, more processing time is required to tease out all relevant issues to determine which could or could not be pursued. Furthermore, for cases not pursuable by us, we try to ascertain and advise the complainants on what other channels of redress may be open to them.
- (d) **Staffing.** Despite the increase in caseload, we have kept a tight control over staffing levels. Over the years, we have coped with the increase in workload by simplifying and streamlining our complaint handling procedures and also flexible deployment of resources to maximize output. Where necessary, we employ temporary case officers to supplement our regular workforce.

The number of staff in the Office as at 31 March each year since 1998 is shown below:

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Regular staff	85	87	91	92	95	89	85	84	85
Temporary staff	0	0	0	0	0.05	0.3	0.2	0.9	1.2

The slightly higher staffing level in 2001 and 2002 was due to the replacement of civil servants by contract staff and the need for handing over arrangements prior to experienced civil servants returning to Government.

In the past year or so, with the general economic improvement and consequently a more vibrant job market in Hong Kong, our Office has experienced a high staff turnover rate, particularly at entry levels. This, coupled with the additional time required for orientation training and settling in, has contributed to our difficulties in meeting the pledge of concluding 70% of such cases within 10 working days.

To tackle the consistently high influx of cases in more recent years, we have augmented our staffing strength by recruiting part-time staff from time to time.

The cumulative effect of the above factors makes it impossible for us to process 70% of OJ or “restricted” cases within 10 working days. Nevertheless, it remains our primary objective to conclude these cases within 15 working days. In fact, only 1.8% of cases in 2005/2006 took more than 15 working days to conclude. This compares favourably with the past three years in terms of overall percentage:

Response Time			
	Within 10 working days (target: 70%)	Within 11-15 working days (target: 30%)	More than 15 working days
2002/2003	60.7%	37.1%	2.2%
2003/2004	71.5%	22.1%	6.4%
2004/2005	62.6%	34.4%	3.0%
2005/2006	40.9%	57.3%	1.8%

We have been reluctant to change our performance pledge because there is no scientific basis for doing so. However we welcome Members' views.

Office of The Ombudsman

December 2006