

**Replies to initial written raised by Finance Committee Members in
examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2008-09**

**Controlling Officer : The Ombudsman
Session No. : 7**

Reply Serial No.*	Question Serial No.	Name of Member#	Head	Programme
<u>OMB001</u>	1916	Hon. HO Chun-yan, Albert	114	Complaints Administration
<u>OMB002</u>	2346	Hon. TO Kun-sun, James	114	Complaints Administration

Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2008-09
**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY TO
INITIAL WRITTEN/SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION**

Reply Serial No.
(in Bold type)

OMB001

Question Serial No.

1916

Head : 114 – Office of The Ombudsman

Subhead (No. & title) : 000 Operational expenses

Programme : Complaints Administration

Controlling Officer : The Ombudsman

Director of Bureau : --

Question :

In the past three years, the numbers of enquiries and complaints received, complaints handled and full investigations conducted by The Ombudsman have been increasing. Has the workload of the Office of The Ombudsman also been increased? If so, why was the estimate of expenditure of the Office for 2008-09 only increased by 4.3% over 2007-08?

Asked by : Hon. HO Chun-yan, Albert

Reply :

The community's growing awareness of citizen's rights to social and public services has resulted in a steady rise in the number of complaints over the years. From 2002-03 to 2006-07, the number of complaint cases rose from 4 382 to 5 606.

No. of complaints received

2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
4 382	4 661	4 654	4 266	5 606

It should be noted that fluctuations in caseload is a natural phenomenon and often subject to circumstances beyond the control of our Office. The increase in 2006-07, for instance, was due to the influx of about 1 300 complaints between late January and March 2007 as a result of the sudden outbreak of a social issue attracting wide public concern. These complaints were outside The Ombudsman's jurisdiction as the organisation involved was not a scheduled organisation in The Ombudsman Ordinance.

To cope with the increase in caseload, we have adopted the following measures over the years.

(a) Recruitment of temporary staff

When necessary, we recruit temporary investigators to meet unexpected upsurge in workload. This allows me the flexibility to adjust my staff complement for seasonal fluctuations of complaints or to take on special projects.

In 2006-07, the number of temporary investigators employed was equivalent to 698 man-days, that is, 2.4 full-time investigators.

(b) Reallocation of cases

At present, each of my investigation teams looks after a schedule of public organisations within my jurisdiction. In case of unanticipated upsurge of cases for a particular team, cases or projects will be reallocated among the teams to maximise output without seeking additional manpower resources.

Notwithstanding these measures, for coping with long-term caseload increase and for staff succession, I have reorganised my investigative workforce and recruited a few more full-time investigation officers this year. In this connection, I have revised the number of investigation teams from 4 to 5 and also reinstated a Direct Investigation team disbanded in 2002-03 due to funding constraint in the public sector. My prudent approach in financial management has enabled me to absorb the additional staff costs within my own financial provision.

The 4.3% increase in my funding provision for 2008-09 is mainly due to additional provision due to the 2007 civil service pay adjustments. Since delinking in 2001, the annual estimate of expenditure of my Office has been calculated on the basis of the funding level fixed at that time with annual adjustments only to cater for inflation and civil service pay adjustments.

Signature	_____
Name in block letters	_____ Alice Tai _____
Post Title	_____ The Ombudsman _____
Date	_____ 20 March 2008 _____

Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2008-09
**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY TO
INITIAL WRITTEN/SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION**

Reply Serial No.
(in Bold type)

OMB002

Question Serial No.

2346

Head : 114 – Office of The Ombudsman

Subhead (No. & title) : 000 Operational expenses

Programme : Complaints Administration

Controlling Officer : The Ombudsman

Director of Bureau : --

Question :

Among the complaint cases not concluded by full investigation, the number of those outside The Ombudsman's jurisdiction rose from 816 in 2004-05 and 762 in 2005-06 to 1 991 in 2006-07.

- (a) Has the Office of The Ombudsman looked into the reason for the drastic increase of such type of complaints? If so, what are the findings?
- (b) Please provide in detail information on the activities organised or measures taken in 2007-08 for enhancing the public's awareness and understanding of work of the Office of The Ombudsman, including the related expenditures.

Asked by : Hon. TO Kun-sun, James

Reply :

(a) The number of complaints outside The Ombudsman's jurisdiction have been steady from 2002-03 to 2005-06 as shown below:

2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
758	633	816	762	1 991

The sudden increase of such cases to 1 991 in 2006-07 was due to the influx of about 1 300 complaints from late January to the end of March 2007 about a significant social issue attracting wide public concern. These complaints were outside The Ombudsman's jurisdiction because the organisation being complained against was not a scheduled organisation in The Ombudsman Ordinance. Discounting these complaints, the number would be about 700 and comparable to such cases in previous years.

It cannot be over-emphasised, however, that enquiries and complaints coming into our Office can and often do fluctuate with circumstances beyond our control. On

the other hand, it may be viewed as a measure of the growing public awareness of our existence.

(b) To promote public awareness and proper understanding of The Ombudsman's role and functions, we have developed publicity and community education programmes. These programmes also aim at cultivating a positive complaint culture in our community and highlighting the importance of fair, open and accountable public administration.

In 2007-08, I spent some \$3,166,000 for publicity programmes. Details of these programmes together with the expenditures incurred are provided below:

	Event/Item	Purpose	Frequenc y	Expenditure
1	Broadcasting of a new Announcement of Public Interest	Promote the concept of ombudsmanship and its significance in improving the standard of public service	Once a year, lasting for 1 to 2 months	\$2,400,000 (for purchase of air-time on radio and TV channels)
2	Press Conferences and Ombuds News	Announce selected anonymised cases and results of our direct investigations to promote quality service in the public sector	About 4 times a year	No specific funding
3	Guided visits to Resource Centre, with talks to groups from schools, youth centers and elderly centres	Introduce the role of The Ombudsman and the procedures for lodging complaints with the Office	About 6 times per month	\$12,000*
4	Outreach talks to universities and departments/organisations	Introduce the functions of the Office, the jurisdiction of The Ombudsman and various complaint handling mechanism	On request, once per two months on average	No specific funding
5	Justice of Peace Assistance Scheme (for JPs enrolled into the scheme): visits to government departments	Provide an opportunity for JPs to share their views on the operation of departments having frequent contacts with the public and the delivery of quality services to the public by these departments	About 3 visits a year	\$2,000*

6	Updating and reprinting publications of the Office	Promote ombudsmanship and deliver messages on the importance of complaint handling in improving the quality of public services	On regular basis	\$52,000*
7	Opinion Survey	Gauge complaint culture of the community and public opinions on services provided by statutory complaint service enhancement and channels for future publicity strategy	About once in 3 to 4 years	\$700,000

*rounded to the nearest thousand

Signature _____

Name in block letters Alice Tai

Post Title The Ombudsman

Date 20 March 2008