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8 June 2011

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Context

Education is judged against the concepts embodied in charters / legislation against a backdrop of parental expectations and demands, and media-led issues.

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Advice and Conciliation Service

The modern complaint system in schools, centres and department teams is

- **listening, responsive, open, accessible and accountable to citizens, staff and stakeholders**
- **Effective, efficient, forward looking and 'best in class' for people with increasing expectations**

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Principles of an effective complaints system 1

The Advice and Conciliation complaints procedure promotes

- **conciliation rather than confrontation**
- **is a positive fair approach to dealing with complaints**
- **parents, users and stakeholders are aware that their complaints are welcomed**
- **staff should know what is expected of them**
- **procedure easily accessible and well published**
- **simple to use and understand**

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Principles of an effective complaints system 2

- **ensures a full fair and impartial investigation**
- **speedy handling, within established time limits**
- **keep people involved, fully informed of action**
- **address all points at issue with an effective response and appropriate redress**
- **respects the right to confidentiality**

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Principles of an effective complaints system 3

•Recommendations made to adjust services from upheld or partially upheld complaints towards continuous improvement in the best interests of learners

•Reporting annually to Education, Children and Families Committee to disseminate best practice under the Public Services Reform Act 2010.

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Vision to Reality

- Established as a pro-active focused approach;
- 2 f/t members of staff : 200,000 clients potentially;
- Staff 'positioning' in C and F Department ;
- Policy document/consultation with stakeholders;
- Procedure guidelines - a positive orientation;
- Expectations and responsibilities set down;
- Advice and Conciliation 'brand' leader in Scotland for education;
- Publicity to staff, stakeholders and public.

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Aims of an effective Advice and Conciliation complaints procedure

Anyone who wishes to make a complaint knows

- how to go about it
- responses to complaints within a reasonable time and in a courteous and effective manner
- people are satisfied that staff have taken their complaint seriously and will deal effectively
- the education service learns from complaints, where complaints are justified, takes appropriate action to secure improvements

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Advice Helpline

- **What?** To assist resolution at local level in schools, centres and teams in departments
- **How?** Effective information
Advice
'Shuttle mediation'
Help, support and challenge
- **Who?** Parents and other Users
Stakeholders
Members of the public

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Advice Helpline (April 2009 to March 2010)

- Parents, Staff, Stakeholders : 200,000 people
- Same day response 95 %
- 1014 total enquiries (35% increase from 2008/09) of which 667 from parents, 227 from staff and 110 from stakeholders.
- Advice/information enquiries total 739
Staff 225; Stakeholders 95 and Parents 419
- Early Resolution of difficulties : Total 275
Stakeholders 16 : Parents 259

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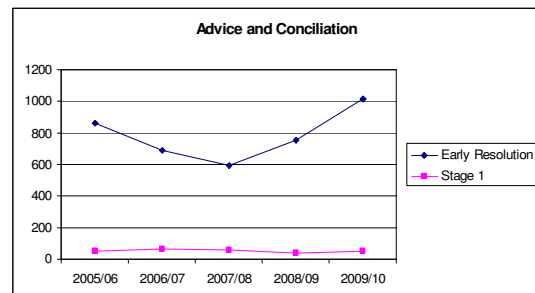
Helpline data

- Policy/Procedure/Practice 463 (46%)
(349 : 46% in 2008/09)
- Bullying 124 (12%) (93 :12% in 2008/09)
- Staff Attitude 81 (8%) (76 :10% in 2008/09)
- 99% (1004) resulted in successful outcomes and did not become formal complaints. 10 complaints progressed from Helpline and were investigated formally.

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As Advice and Early Resolutions increase formal complaints remain low



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‘Early Resolution’

The Advice Helpline provides a pathway to Early Resolution to parents, stakeholders and staff.

As each party’s effectiveness increases through

- advice, support and challenge and
- continuing professional development for staff

-formal complaints decrease!

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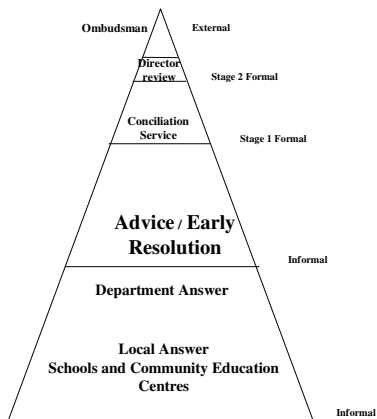
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Conciliation Service

- The Conciliation Manager investigates complaints fairly and impartially which have not been resolved at local level (schools, education centres and sections of the Department).
- Mediation is used towards complaint resolution, when necessary.
- Recommendations are made for management action to be taken as outcomes of upheld, or partially upheld complaints.

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2009/10 Outcomes

- 51 complaint cases (39 cases in 2008/09: 31% increase).
- Upheld or partially upheld complaints numbered 17 (33%), while 34 (66%) were not upheld.
- Policy/Procedure 18 (35%) : 1 upheld: 3 partially upheld
- Staff attitude 9 (17%) : 1 upheld: 2 partially upheld
- Bullying 7 (14%) : 5 partially upheld

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Outcomes from formal complaint investigations

- 48 formal investigations per annum on average over 3 years at stage 1;
- 20 complaints resolved using full mediation process;
- Only 2 referred to Director’s review formal stage 2;
 - One referred to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman;
 - Resolution time averaged 10 working days ;
- 45% were resolved in >5 days and 91% > 15 days.

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Comparative data year on year

- Complaints have decreased by 7% in the last 3 years and 35% over 10 years
- Justified complaints decreased by 12% due to increased accountability and effective handling at local level
- Audited levels of parents satisfaction at 90% when justified complaints are only 27%
- QED: the outcome is not the most important factor for parents but being listened to, being taken seriously with a full and fair investigation with action taken as necessary, is crucial to success.

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Model of service

- Open access, staff availability, responsiveness
- Local answer at point of contact effective
- Every opportunity given to resolve at local level-referred to Head Teacher/Manager
- Department sections also considered 'local'
- Accountability to 'own' the problem, taking appropriate action towards a meaningful solution
- Inclusive responsibility to resolve at local level
- Seeing complaints as 'free market research'

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Staff benefits of an effective Conciliation Service

- Effective early resolution advice to senior staff at local level-support and challenge;
- Partnership approach- Department, Parents+ Pupil and Staff ensures ownership- [triangulation];
- Fair and impartial investigation;
- Mediation and recommended action plan towards resolution of serious complaints- more effective use of staff resources;
- Full consultation and progress reports.

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Staff benefits 2

- As a 'platform' for a way forward rather than history (again);
- Cluster group opportunities for Head Teachers in non-drama, non-crises circumstances;
- Levels of staff satisfaction audited annually;
- Conferences, seminars, Continuing Professional Development customised to staff requirements;
- Sharing /dissemination best practice;
- Review 'free market research' to inform policy and/or adjust services.

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Since partnership is

... a term often used uncritically, implying it is highly desirable, unproblematic and easily attainable.

In reality, interpretations of partnership are hard to grasp, intellectually challenging and extremely difficult to realise in practice.

Ultimately it is process rather than a product.

(John Bastiani 1993)

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Parents benefit from an effective conciliation service

- Welcoming service;
- Being listened to and taken seriously;
- Fair and impartial investigation;
- Progress reports/mediation;
- Outcome of investigation/Action taken;
- Speedy response;
- Effective communications/ better information;
- Maximising partnership working approach with staff in the best interests of the child.
- Action taken from upheld/partially upheld complaints

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And so.....

Advice and Conciliation as a model provides an effective service in maximising partnership with parents and staff through support and challenge

Through a focused, positive and creative approach is has proven success in complaints management" as reported by HMIE 2003 (Edinburgh).

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