

Closure of the Office of the Legal Services Complaints Commissioner on 31 March 2010

The Legal Services Complaints Commissioner worked with the Law Society, on behalf of consumers, to improve the way it handled complaints about solicitors in England and Wales. The Legal Services Complaints Commissioner was Zahida Manzoor CBE and she was appointed in 2004. Her Office was an associate office of the Ministry of Justice.

The mission of the Commissioner's office was to:

- regulate the Law Society, to ensure that it handled complaints about its members effectively and efficiently, providing consumers with a fair and prompt quality service; and
- positively influence and support the Law Society, and to work fairly, openly and honestly with it and all other stakeholders.

The Commissioner's vision was to:

- secure a Law Society complaints process that provided a fair and prompt quality service to the consumers of legal services.

Background

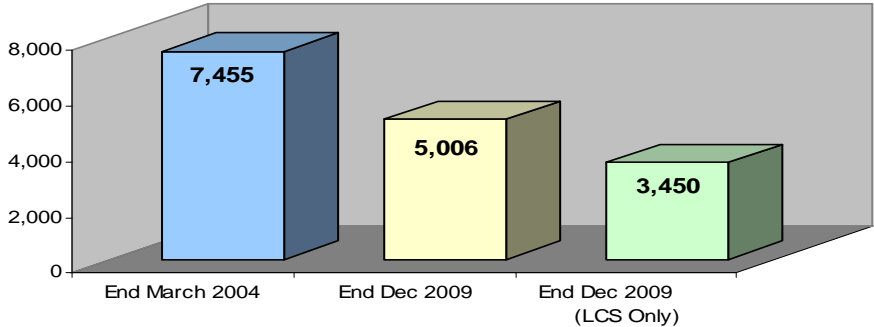
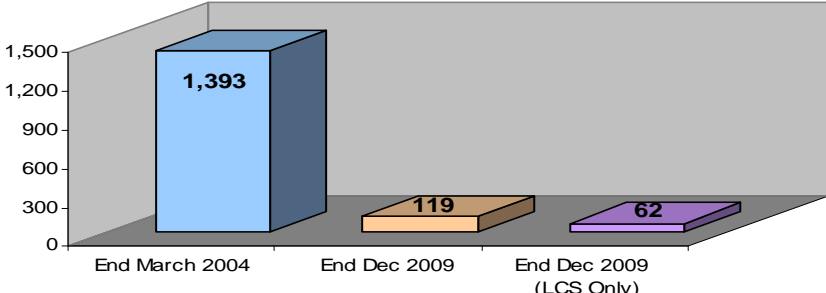
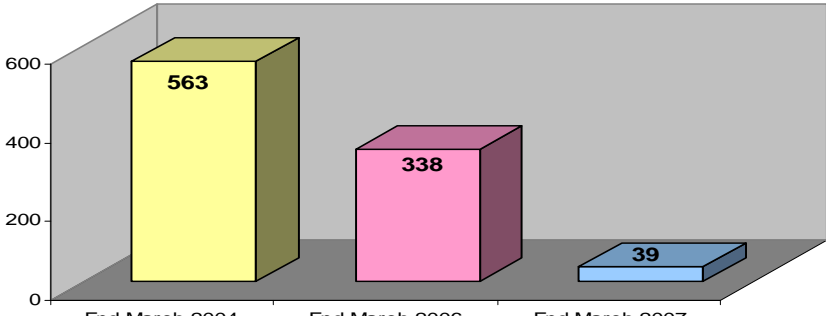
Zahida Manzoor CBE was formally appointed as Legal Services Complaints Commissioner by the Lord Chancellor in February 2004, with full powers under the Access to Justice Act 1999 in relation to the Law Society of England and Wales. As Commissioner she examined the Law Society's capability to handle complaints made about its members efficiently and effectively, and reviewed its end-to-end processes.

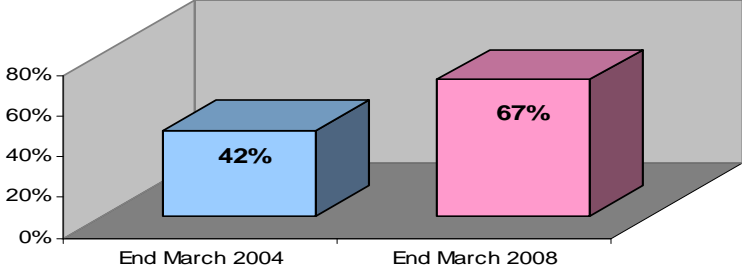
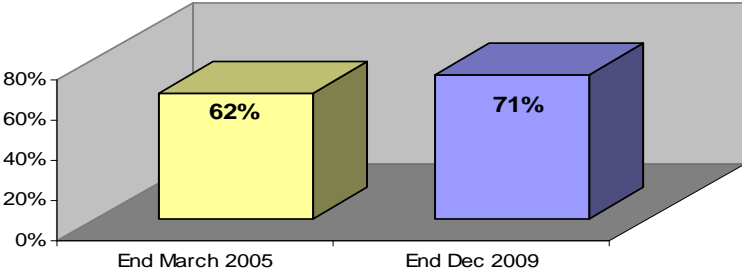
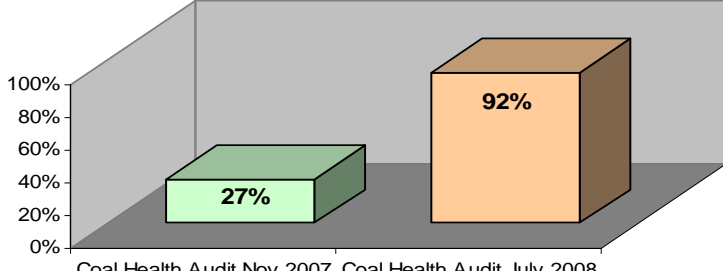
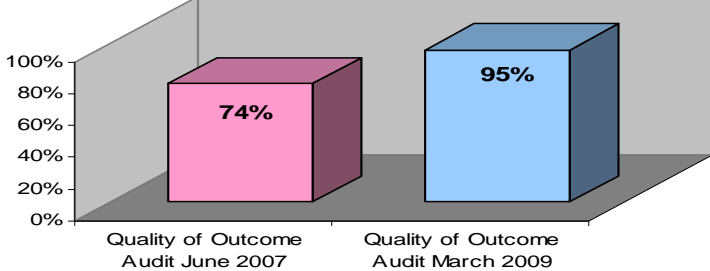
Key achievements

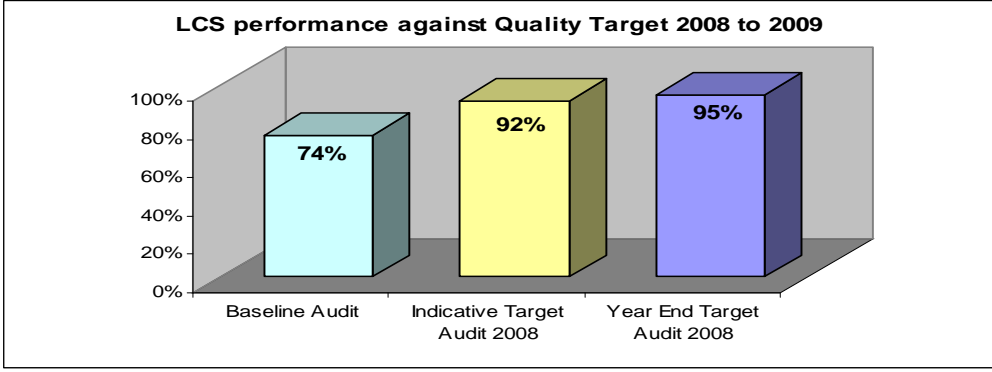
In 2004, the regulatory goal with the Law Society and its complaint handling arms, the Legal Complaints Service (LCS) and the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA), was to move its complaints handling away from crisis and poor performance and towards the delivery of an efficient and effective service for consumers and the legal profession. This regulatory goal has been achieved across all the key areas of complaints handling through effective targeting by the Commissioner. This has led to:

- improving the speed with which complaints are closed;
- improved quality and consistency of decision making;
- improved consumer experience; and
- a reduced backlog of cases.

The table below summarises some of the key measurable improvements achieved through effective regulation of the Law Society's complaints handling:

Performance area	Results before and after targeting by the Commissioner								
Work in progress levels within LCS and SRA	<p data-bbox="560 472 1326 495" style="text-align: center;">LCS & SRA work in progress - March 2004 to December 2009</p>  <table border="1" data-bbox="496 506 1374 831"> <thead> <tr> <th>Period</th> <th>Work in Progress</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>End March 2004</td> <td>7,455</td> </tr> <tr> <td>End Dec 2009</td> <td>5,006</td> </tr> <tr> <td>End Dec 2009 (LCS Only)</td> <td>3,450</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Period	Work in Progress	End March 2004	7,455	End Dec 2009	5,006	End Dec 2009 (LCS Only)	3,450
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Cases over 12 months old	<p data-bbox="600 887 1286 931" style="text-align: center;">Total number of LCS & SRA cases over 12 months old - March 2004 to December 2009</p>  <table border="1" data-bbox="528 943 1358 1234"> <thead> <tr> <th>Period</th> <th>Number of Cases</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>End March 2004</td> <td>1,393</td> </tr> <tr> <td>End Dec 2009</td> <td>119</td> </tr> <tr> <td>End Dec 2009 (LCS Only)</td> <td>62</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Period	Number of Cases	End March 2004	1,393	End Dec 2009	119	End Dec 2009 (LCS Only)	62
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Cases over 18 months old	<p data-bbox="624 1290 1262 1312" style="text-align: center;">LCS & SRA cases over 18 months old - 2005 to 2007</p>  <table border="1" data-bbox="528 1323 1358 1637"> <thead> <tr> <th>Period</th> <th>Number of Cases</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>End March 2004</td> <td>563</td> </tr> <tr> <td>End March 2006</td> <td>338</td> </tr> <tr> <td>End March 2007</td> <td>39</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Period	Number of Cases	End March 2004	563	End March 2006	338	End March 2007	39
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Performance area	Results before and after targeting by the Commissioner						
Percentage of cases closed within 3 months	<p data-bbox="560 286 1326 342">Percentage of LCS & SRA cases closed within 3 months - March 2004 to March 2008</p>  <table border="1" data-bbox="571 347 1315 616"> <thead> <tr> <th>Period</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>End March 2004</td> <td>42%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>End March 2008</td> <td>67%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Period	Percentage	End March 2004	42%	End March 2008	67%
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Legal Services Ombudsman satisfaction Index	<p data-bbox="663 663 1256 719">Performance against the Ombudsman Target / Recommendation</p>  <table border="1" data-bbox="571 723 1315 992"> <thead> <tr> <th>Period</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>End March 2005</td> <td>62%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>End Dec 2009</td> <td>71%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Period	Percentage	End March 2005	62%	End Dec 2009	71%
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Percentage of Coal Health Compensation cases where compensation was awarded for both the deduction and poor service	<p data-bbox="580 1055 1310 1111">Percentage of Coal Health Compensation cases awarded compensation for both deduction and poor service</p>  <table border="1" data-bbox="580 1122 1305 1391"> <thead> <tr> <th>Audit Period</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Coal Health Audit Nov 2007</td> <td>27%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Coal Health Audit July 2008</td> <td>92%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Audit Period	Percentage	Coal Health Audit Nov 2007	27%	Coal Health Audit July 2008	92%
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Percentage of Legal Complaints Service cases where a reasonable outcome was achieved for the consumer	<p data-bbox="580 1458 1302 1514">Percentage of LCS cases where reasonable outcome achieved for the consumer</p>  <table border="1" data-bbox="587 1518 1299 1787"> <thead> <tr> <th>Audit Period</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Quality of Outcome Audit June 2007</td> <td>74%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Quality of Outcome Audit March 2009</td> <td>95%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Audit Period	Percentage	Quality of Outcome Audit June 2007	74%	Quality of Outcome Audit March 2009	95%
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Legal Complaints Service performance during 2008-2009	 <p style="text-align: center;">LCS performance against Quality Target 2008 to 2009</p> <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <thead> <tr> <th>Audit Type</th> <th>Performance (%)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Baseline Audit</td> <td>74%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Indicative Target Audit 2008</td> <td>92%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Year End Target Audit 2008</td> <td>95%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Audit Type	Performance (%)	Baseline Audit	74%	Indicative Target Audit 2008	92%	Year End Target Audit 2008	95%
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Published consumer complaint standard	<p>Consumers need to be aware of the service they can expect when making a complaint. In 2004 the Law Society did not publish its service standards. These were published in 2006, meaning consumers can now compare the standard received against the standard of service expected.</p>								

There were also broader achievements which demonstrate other improvements since 2004:

- Leaving a strong legacy for the legal profession, including investment in client care.** In March 2009, the Law Society and the Commissioner jointly announced an agreement for the Law Society to invest a substantial amount (£275,000) in a range of client care measures designed to improve capability and capacity in the legal profession including a consultancy service to help improve firms of solicitors identified as needing help with client care and complaints handling. As part of this initiative two additional places per year for 5 years are funded on the Law Society Diversity Access Scheme. This is designed to encourage increasing numbers of people from diverse backgrounds to enter the legal profession.
- Improving the quality and consistency of complaints handling for vulnerable clients.** In January 2008, the Commissioner published a Special Report into the handling by the Legal Complaints Service and the Solicitors Regulation Authority of Coal Health Compensation complaints. The Legal Complaints Service took steps to address the 13 areas for action detailed in the Special Report.

A further investigation by the Commissioner's office in October 2008 showed an improvement in handling of these cases in the 5 months after the report was published. As a consequence of the Special Report, sums ranging from £229 to £5625 were paid back to individual miners by the Law Society where a full refund of any improper deduction made by the solicitor had been due.

Commissioner's statement made at the closure of OLSCC on 31 March 2010:

"This is a momentous time for the delivery and regulation of legal services. The reforms of the past five years are now coming to fruition with the full establishment of the Legal Services Board and the Office for Legal Complaints. Expectations for these new bodies and the profession they preside over are high.

With the establishment of the Legal Services Board and the Office for Legal Complaints, my work is coming to an end. At the conclusion of my role and the closure of my office on 31 March 2010 the outlook and optimism for legal services regulation and complaints handling could not be more different from when I was appointed as Legal Services Complaints Commissioner in 2004.

I wish the new organisations every success – they inherit a strong platform on which to build."

If you wish to raise a complaint about your solicitor or your legal services representative you should go to the Office for Legal Complaints website www.officeforlegalcomplaints.org.uk . More information about the regulation of legal services can be found at www.legalservicesboard.org.uk