Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate

Annual Report for 2006/07

MARCH 2008
Foreword by Pat McFadden – Minister for Employment Relations

I welcome the third publicised annual report of the Employment Agency Standards (EAS) Inspectorate.

Temporary and agency workers are a key part of the UK’s flexible labour market. Over the past few years we have implemented a number of significant changes to ensure the flexibility hirer companies need, and agency workers value, is balanced by appropriate protections for agency workers.

In December, the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses (Amendment) Regulations 2007 (‘the Amendment Regulations’) were made. These implement the measures to protect vulnerable agency workers which we consulted on earlier last year. The Amendment Regulations address a number of bad practices that affect the most vulnerable agency workers, but without placing additional burdens on the majority of agencies who act responsibly and comply with their legal obligations. These changes will come into force on 6 April 2008.

We are also seeking, through the Employment Bill which is currently going through Parliament, to strengthen the penalty regime for offences committed against employment agency legislation by enabling the most serious cases to be tried in the Crown Court. This will have the effect of increasing the maximum penalty for these cases to an unlimited fine. We will extend the investigative powers of the EAS Inspectorate to assist inspectors to establish the extent and scale of illegal practice.
We have also responded to criticisms that there are not enough inspectors working for the EAS Inspectorate with a pledge to double the number of inspectors. The EAS Inspectorate is currently recruiting the additional inspectors.

The Government has also established the Vulnerable Workers Enforcement Forum which I chair. This brings together the TUC and frontline unions, workplace enforcement agencies, representatives from business and Citizens Advice Bureaux. The Forum’s remit is to establish the nature and extent of abuse of workplace rights, to consider how best to protect the vulnerable in the workplace, and to identify options for improving the effectiveness of the enforcement regime.

The recruitment industry is an ever growing one with an estimated annual turnover of £24.5 billion. However, BERR is currently commissioning research to obtain a clear up to date picture of the size and scope of the recruitment industry.

I hope that those of you with an interest in the recruitment industry will find the following report helpful, which essentially sets out the work of the EAS Inspectorate, covering the period April 2006 – March 2007.
Executive summary

The Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) was formed in June 2007 and leads work to create the conditions for business success through competitive and flexible markets that create value for businesses, consumers and employees. It drives regulatory reform and works across Government and with the regions to raise levels of UK productivity. It is the voice for business across Government and also responsible for promoting choice and quality for consumers, and for ensuring an improved quality of life for employees.

BERR’s Employment Agency Standards (EAS) Inspectorate which is responsible for enforcing the agency legislation, will be doubling the number of EAS inspectors during 2008 and is currently recruiting.

The Government’s consultation on a package of measures to protect the most vulnerable agency workers will bring revisions to the Conduct Regulations due to come into effect in April 2008 and better guidance for workers and agencies.

In addition, the planned changes in the Employment Bill will enable criminal offences under the Employment Agencies Act 1973 (‘the 1973 Act’) to be capable of being tried in a Crown Court and give the EAS Inspectorate clearer investigative powers regarding those suspected of committing offences under the 1973 Act.

By making it more difficult for the small minority of rogue agencies to cut corners at the expense of the reputable side of the industry, these changes should benefit both workers and most agencies.
1. Introduction


Businesses covered by the 1973 Act

The Act divides those operating within the private recruitment industry into two categories – employment agencies and employment businesses.

- An employment agency introduces work-seekers to prospective employers, for direct employment by those employers. This is usually known in the industry as ‘permanent recruitment’ even though the employment may only be for a fixed period.

- An employment business supplies individuals it employs to hirers for temporary assignments or contracts where the individuals work under the control of hirers. This is usually known as ‘supply of temporary workers’.

A number of companies will cover both sides of the business and therefore fall into the definition of both employment agency and employment business. For ease of reference, wherever possible throughout this Report, ‘agency’ will be used to refer to both employment agency and employment business.

2. Background

The EAS Inspectorate

The EAS Inspectorate was set up in 1976 to enforce the provisions of the Employment Agencies Act 1973 and Regulations made under the 1973 Act. EAS inspectors investigate all relevant complaints received (i.e. those which allege that an agency has breached the employment agency legislation). They visit agencies’ premises, where appropriate, and inspect their records. The 1973 Act enables inspectors to enter any relevant business premises, which they believe are being used for the purposes of an agency or, to inspect those premises and any records or other documents. They can also take copies of any relevant documents kept on the premises. Inspectors also undertake spot checks in those sectors where on a risk-based analysis they consider that breaches of the legislation are more likely to occur.
Although inspectors seek in the first instance to achieve compliance through advice and persuasion, the Inspectorate can take prosecution action, where appropriate, in a Magistrates’ Court against an agency found to be in breach of the legislation. If the prosecution is successful, the agency may be fined up to £5,000 for each offence. Inspectors can also apply to an employment tribunal for orders prohibiting those persons who are considered to be unsuitable, from operating an agency for up to 10 years.

The EAS Inspectorate also operates a telephone helpline (0845 955 5105), which is open from 9.30 -16.30 each working day, to provide advice on the Inspectorate’s work and to assist in interpretation of the legislation. Each year the helpline handles on average some 10,000 enquiries, including around 1,000 complaints about the conduct of agencies.

The Inspectorate currently consists of 12 field inspectors (some of whom work part-time), four staff who operate the helpline and a management team of three (who also carry warrant cards). The helpline and management team are located in London.

In September 2007 the Secretary of State for BERR, John Hutton, announced plans to double the number of inspectors in EAS. The doubling of the number of inspectors will mean an addition of 12 inspector posts. The EAS Inspectorate is currently seeking to recruit the additional inspectors.

Due to the recruitment of additional inspectors, the EAS Inspectorate is expanding its helpline team, which also provides administration support to the inspectors. Once the new helpline staff have received training, the helpline opening times will be extended from its existing times of 9.30 – 16.30 to 9.00 – 17.00 each working day.

The private recruitment industry

The private recruitment industry carries a distinct responsibility to treat those who use its services (both agency workers and hirers) fairly. In order to help ensure that it meets that responsibility, there are statutory regulations and also a number of industry codes of practice and best practice guidance covering the various sectors within the industry. There are a number of trade associations representing the various elements of the private recruitment industry. These sectors include:

- The high street agencies providing services for the commercial, industrial, driving, construction, catering and care sectors,

- The modelling and entertainment sectors, and

- The IT and technology sector.

Each of these associations have a code of practice, which their members agree to follow, and will normally issue best practice guidance for its members. Trade associations also have disciplinary procedures to consider
complaints concerning their members’ breach of the codes of conduct. Penalties for those found to be in breach could include expulsion from the association and possibly a fine.

BERR is currently commissioning research to establish the size of the industry and the number of agency workers.

3. Guidance

The former DTI produced, in conjunction with the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC) and Equity, a detailed guide on the provisions in the Conduct Regulations. In addition we have issued a short guide on the legislation, which also sets out the EAS Inspectorate service commitment to its clients. The guidance and details of the legislation can be downloaded from the BERR website at www.berr.gov.uk/employment/employment-agencies/index.html

Following the Government’s consultation to address a package of measures to protect the most vulnerable agency workers, amendments have been made to the Conduct Regulations. The Amendment Regulations will come into force on 6 April 2008 and guidance has been produced which is also available at www.berr.gov.uk/employment/employment-agencies/index.html

4. Legislation

History

The private recruitment industry in Great Britain, which provides services to work-seekers and employers looking to fill vacant posts, has existed for over 100 years. Indeed, regulation of recruitment providers is almost as old as the industry itself. It began during the first five years of the twentieth century when the Glasgow and Manchester Corporations and the London County Council obtained powers to make by-laws to regulate entertainment employment agencies. At that time the provisions largely concerned the prevention of fraud or immorality and the provision of adequate accommodation for those in service.

The Employment Agencies Act 1973

The primary legislation regulating the private recruitment industry in Great Britain is the Employment Agencies Act 1973 (‘the 1973 Act’), which came into force in 1976. There is equivalent legislation for Northern Ireland which can be found on the Department for Employment and Learning website at www.delni.gov.uk/index/work/employment-agency-and-business-regulations-2.htm
The 1973 Act places a number of obligations on agencies; the main one being to prevent a person carrying on an agency from requesting or directly or indirectly receiving any fee from an agency worker (work-seeker) for providing work-finding services. The only exception is that agencies can charge agency workers for the provision of such services for certain occupations in the entertainment, modelling and professional sports sectors. The Conduct Regulations, which are the main Regulations giving effect to the 1973 Act, came into force on 6 April 2004 and replaced the previous Regulations, which were introduced in 1976 and repealed in 2004.

Exemptions

Section 13 of the 1973 Act sets out a limited number of exemptions to the legislation. These include work-finding services provided by university appointments boards and certain other educational institutions, by local authorities, by trade unions, employers’ organisations and certain professional bodies for their members, by charitable organisations. Also excluded are companies obtaining employment exclusively for ex-members of HM forces or for persons released from prisons or other institutions.

Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations 2003

When the Conduct Regulations were introduced in 2004, certain obligations in the previous legislation, which were considered to be outdated and placed undue restrictions on the recruitment industry, were removed and other new obligations were introduced to protect workers. Guidance material is available on the BERR website at www.berr.gov.uk/employment/employment-agencies/index.html

Copies of the Conduct Regulations (SI 2003/3319) can be downloaded from the Office of Public Sector Information’s website at www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/uksi_20033319_en.pdf

The Amendment Regulations (SI 2007/ 3575) can be downloaded from the Office of Public Sector Information’s website at www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2007/uksi_20073575_en_1
Revisions to the Conduct Regulations under the Amendment Regulations

The changes will come into effect from 6 April 2008 and include:

(i) Giving work-seekers the right to cancel or withdraw from non-work-finding services at any time, without suffering any detriment or penalty. The work-seeker must give the provider of such services (which in some cases will be the agency or employment business but, in others, may be a separate but connected supplier) written notice in either paper or electronic form. For services relating to the provision of living accommodation, 10 working days’ written notice is required. To cancel or withdraw from all other services, 5 working days’ written notice must be given.

(ii) The introduction of a 7 day cooling off period for contracts between agencies and work-seekers in the entertainment and modelling occupations. Agencies will no longer be able to take fees from a work-seeker for including their details in a publication until 7 days after the work-seeker has entered into a contract with the agency. During the cooling off period, the work-seeker is entitled to cancel or withdraw from the contract with the agency with immediate effect and without detriment or penalty. The agency must not publish information on the work-seeker during this period. The cooling off period applies whether the work-seeker signed the contract at a casting session or directly approached the agency.

(iii) Easing administrative burdens on agencies: they will no longer have to provide detailed written information to workers on assignments of less than 5 working days. Providing an employment business has already given essential details in writing to a work-seeker, such as the type of work, experience, training and qualifications necessary, any risk to health and safety and the rate of pay, they need only provide the name of the hirer, start date, duration or likely duration in written form to the worker.

Similarly, if an employment business has already obtained from the work-seeker all the essential information regarding identity, experience, training, qualifications and any necessary authorisations and where the assignment is intended to last for 5 working days or less, it only needs to inform the hirer (orally or in writing) of the name of the work-seeker and give written confirmation that it has obtained this information.

However, where an assignment is extended beyond 5 working days, the outstanding information must be provided no later than the end of the 8th working day of the assignment or, where the assignment ends sooner, the end of that assignment.

Minor and technical changes

(i) Where work-seekers are supplied to work with, care for or attend to vulnerable persons, amended regulation 22 now stipulates that where an
agency has taken all reasonable steps to obtain two references and to obtain copies of qualifications and authorisations of the work-seeker but has been unable to do so fully, it should inform the hirer of the steps it has taken in order to try to comply fully with the requirements. Previously this requirement only applied where an agency has taken every reasonable step to obtain references but had been unable to do so.

(ii) Regulation 28 (Confidentiality) has been amended to make it clear that the requirement on agencies to inform the hirer if they receive information that a worker supplied is or may be unsuitable takes precedent over the prohibition on disclosing information about a work-seeker without their consent. It is purely for clarification and does not change any obligations on agencies.

(iii) Regulation 32 has been amended to oblige an agency to provide written notification to a hirer where an incorporated work-seeker and the person to be supplied gives notice to opt-out of the coverage of the Regulations.

(iv) ‘Clothes, hair or make-up stylists’ has been added to the list of occupations in the entertainment and modelling industry in respect of which agencies can charge fees to work-seekers. This change reflects the reality of the way stylists are employed as part of the modelling/entertainment industry.

Non-regulatory changes

Additional guidance is being drawn up to advise potential migrant workers about living in Britain and the cost of living.

Agencies that supply drivers need to be aware of their responsibilities under the drivers’ hours and working time rules. Guidance on these rules is available on the Department for Transport’s website at www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/freight/road/workingtime

We have produced ‘Top Tips’ for would-be entertainers and models warning them of potential pitfalls and giving advice about seeking to enter the world of fame and celebrity.

Guidance on the Amendment Regulations can be downloaded at www.berr.gov.uk/employment/employment-agencies/index.html

EAS working with the Gangmaster Licensing Authority

The Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA) was established on 1 April 2005 (following the introduction of the Gangmasters (Licensing) Act 2004) in response to the Morecombe Bay tragedy and particular issues and problems in the agricultural and associated food processing sectors. The GLA is responsible for introducing and operating a licensing scheme for labour providers working in the agricultural and horticultural sectors and those gathering shellfish and working in related food processing and packaging sectors. Section 27 of the Gangmasters (Licensing Act) 2004 which came into force on 1 October disapplies the Employment Agencies Act 1973 in
relation to those activities carried on by employment agencies and businesses which require a licence under the GLA. The GLA opened for business for licence applications in April 2006.

The EAS Inspectorate works closely with the GLA as follows:

- The helpline team provide advice to the GLA on the suitability of applications for licences based on the EAS’s information on applicants.
- Most inspectors are in regular contact with GLA colleagues and a Memorandum of Understanding between the EAS Inspectorate and GLA has been agreed to facilitate close co-operation between the organisations.
- GLA licensing conditions are based on and broadly consistent with the Conduct Regulations.

The EAS Inspectorate and GLA officials are actively developing swifter and more effective information-sharing procedures to facilitate the EAS Inspectorate’s awareness of problem businesses identified by the GLA and vice versa.

5. Work of the EAS during the reporting year

The EAS Inspectorate takes a risk-based approach to enforcement, offering advice, supporting business and assisting with compliance but taking firm action, including prosecution or prohibition where necessary against those that mistreat their workers. It is the EAS Inspectorate’s experience that, following action by an EAS inspector, the overwhelming majority of agencies found to be in breach of any provisions in the legislation willingly change their working arrangements to ensure they comply with the law.

The EAS Inspectorate shares the industry’s commitment to raise standards and much progress has been achieved in recent years. We will continue to work closely with those operating within the industry to encourage continued improvement in standards.

During the period covered by this report, a total of 1,103 complaints were received or initiated, a slight increase on the previous year. This included targeted inspections of entertainment agencies in the Leeds area and the care sector in and around Cardiff.

The number of infringements identified totalled 1,892 as opposed to 3,256 the previous year. We believe the main reason for this significant decrease is due to the fact that as the new Conduct Regulations have bedded in, agencies have become more aware of their legal obligations. This later figure is comparable with earlier years’ figures (in 2004-05 the figure was 1,796).

The EAS Inspectorate has a published target of conducting investigations into complaints within 6 weeks of receipt. For 2006/07 onwards, targets for
individual inspectors are based on percentages of cases being cleared within set time limits.

Details of the cases handled by the EAS Inspectorate from 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007 are set out at the back of the report:

- Annex A – chart of case statistics
- Annex B – complaints and inspections carried out by industrial sector
- Annex C – infringements found by industrial sector
- Annex D – % comparison of complaints and inspections carried out by industrial areas between 2006-07 and 2005-06
- Annex E – % comparison of infringements found by industrial areas between 2006-07 and 2005-06

These show that the main sectors where the inspectors are involved continue to be:

- Entertainment and modelling (taken together) – 23% of complaints and inspections, and 30% of infringements;
- Industrial/construction /drivers (agricultural workers) – 23% of complaints and inspections, and 25% of infringements;
- Secretarial/admin (i.e. all office-based work) – 16% of complaints and inspections, and 10% of infringements.

Note: The EAS Inspectorate’s remit ceased to cover agricultural workers from 1 October 2006.

Vulnerable Agency Workers Consultation

In the former DTI’s strategy paper ‘Success at Work’, vulnerable agency workers were identified as a subset of the wider group the Government would focus on to tackle abuses. We published a consultation document on 20 February 2007 on measures to protect vulnerable agency workers, whilst not placing burdens on the majority of reputable agencies. The consultation closed on 31 May and the Government published its response on 23 November 2007. Amendments to the Conduct Regulations were made in December and will come into force by 6 April 2008. The consultation paper and Government response are available at [www.berr.gov.uk/files/file37724.pdf](http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file37724.pdf) and [www.berr.gov.uk/files/file42483.pdf](http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file42483.pdf)

We received a total of 66 responses from a wide range of interested parties, including agency workers, recruitment agencies, legal experts and organisations representing agencies and workers.

The changes to the Conduct Regulations following the consultation are set out in Section 4 of this report.
**EAS Inspectorate enforcement strategy**

As noted in Section 3, the number of EAS inspectors is going to be doubled. There are three likely areas of work that will grow as a result of the increase in the number of inspectors:

**Targeted inspections**

These will form a greater proportion of the EAS Inspectorate’s work. We plan to develop a more sophisticated evidence-based approach to setting targets on the basis of risk and ordering priorities. An improved system to exchange information with other enforcement bodies, subject to existing legal constraints on disclosure of information, will help with this process.

**Increase in prosecution/prohibition work**

This element of the work is already increasing (see Section 6 below). Once the new inspectors are trained in prosecution and prohibition techniques, it will enable the EAS Inspectorate to devote more effort to prosecutions and seeking prohibitions of those unsuitable to run agencies by virtue of their record of misconduct.

**Closer working with other enforcement bodies**

This will also help the EAS Inspectorate to identify those disreputable agencies that seek to operate ‘below the radar’. It is likely to involve an increase in work with trusted intermediaries both to obtain information about such agencies and to establish trust to encourage complaints from vulnerable agency workers.

**Raising the profile of the EAS Inspectorate**

Once the enlarged team is in place, the EAS Inspectorate will also focus on raising its profile and that of its inspectors.

**Employment Bill – EAS Penalties and Enforcement**

We are proposing to strengthen the penalties regime for offences committed against employment agency legislation and give clearer investigative powers for the EAS Inspectorate in the Employment Bill. The Government’s consultation on these proposals closed on 8 August and the response was published in December 2007. The consultation paper and Government response are available at [www.berr.gov.uk/files/file39439.pdf](http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file39439.pdf) and [www.berr.gov.uk/files/file42606.pdf](http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file42606.pdf)

We have sought views on the criminal offences under the 1973 Act; whether serious cases should be capable of being tried in a Crown Court and, whether such cases, should carry a maximum penalty of an unlimited fine. The consultation document also sought comments on whether the Inspectorate
should be given clearer investigative powers in order to obtain financial information regarding those suspected of offences under the 1973 Act.

The proposals would reduce the EAS Inspectorate’s dependence on witnesses prepared to stand up in court in order to achieve a conviction. Witnesses can be reluctant to give evidence due to fears of intimidation or being seen as a trouble-maker. The proposal would enable the EAS Inspectorate to bring charges of ‘attempting to’ commit offences and the proposals would also enable EAS inspectors to take away documents for copying. The clarification of the EAS Inspectorate’s investigative powers would enable EAS inspectors to require banks to supply financial records of agencies where the agency has been given written notice to supply the record and has failed to comply. This will assist the EAS inspectors to establish the extent and scale of illegal practices. In a number of cases, the EAS Inspectorate may only have received complaints from or regarding a few workers. It may well be that there are a significant number of other workers affected. Reputable agencies will not be affected by these proposals, except to the extent that they will benefit from more effective enforcement actions against rogue agencies that act to the detriment of the reputable majority.

**Vulnerable Workers Enforcement Forum**

The Vulnerable Workers Enforcement Forum first met in June 2007 and is chaired by Pat McFadden, BERR’s Employment Relations Minister. It brings together unions, advice and enforcement bodies, including the EAS Inspectorate, the CBI and other business groups to look at the hard facts of abuses in the UK labour market. The Forum has provided useful opportunities to raise the profile of the EAS Inspectorate and what it can do with important stakeholder groups.

**Vulnerable Workers Pilots**

BERR has also committed £800,000 to two Vulnerable Worker Pilots in London and Birmingham. The pilots are testing different ways of providing support for vulnerable workers and their employers at local level, and will contribute to the evidence base on vulnerable employment. They will run for two years. The London Pilot is being run by the TUC and is focused on the building services industry in Tower Hamlets and the City of London. The London Pilot aims to demonstrate good practice to government by helping vulnerable workers to address issues and helping them to progress in the labour market.

There are several sub partnership groups and the EAS Inspectorate is currently participating in the Employment Standards Sub-partner group. The main focus of this group is to build effective communication pathways between statutory agencies, organisations and trade unions working with vulnerable workers and educating employers to comply with the legislation.
6. Prosecutions and prohibition cases

We do not hesitate to prosecute where this is appropriate, but we only take this action where other routes to compliance have failed or are clearly not appropriate. In the overwhelming majority of cases where our inspectors discover breaches in the legislation they find that, when made aware of these infringements, agencies agree to change their procedures including paying any money owed to a worker. During this reporting year the EAS Inspectorate undertook 1,632 inspections/investigations of agencies and recovered over £30,000 of workers' wages that were illegally withheld. It is unlikely that the workers would have recovered the money by other means.

A number of cases were considered for prosecution and prohibition during the year of the report. In February 2007, the EAS Inspectorate successfully prosecuted a rogue agent for operating a recruitment website whilst prohibited by the former DTI. The agent was found guilty of charging vulnerable workers up to £124 a time for falsely claiming that he could find them work overseas, despite being banned in 2003 from running an employment agency for 10 years. He was ordered to pay back the proceeds of crime from which he benefited – in excess of £20,000 – and his website has been closed down.

Since the end of the reporting year

In April 2007, two owners of a hauling driving agency were prohibited from running or being associated with running an agency for 10 years and 5 years respectively following their convictions for health and safety breaches which led to imprisonment of one of them and fines for both of them. It was shown that they allowed HGV drivers to exceed their permitted driving hours without rest, as a result of which a driver working through the agency fell asleep at the wheel and collided with another lorry – killing both drivers.

In May 2007 an owner of another driving agency was prohibited from running or being associated with running an agency for 10 years following his conviction for manslaughter. He coerced his drivers to work excessive hours and a driver working through the agency fell asleep at the wheel, killing a cyclist.

A former model agency owner, who served a jail term for rape, on release under licence, was prohibited from running or being associated with running an agency by an employment tribunal for 10 years in October 2007. The individual’s wife was also prohibited from running an agency from their home address and from enabling any other person to do so in order to reduce the likelihood that her husband would come into contact with work-seekers.

A model agent was prosecuted in August 2007 for non-payment of wages to four models and other charges and was fined a total of £2,695 in compensation and court costs.

Annex A

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<th>Investigations</th>
<th>2005-06</th>
<th>2006-07</th>
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<td>Complaints received or initiated</td>
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<td>Cases found as out of scope of the 1973 Act</td>
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<td>452</td>
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<td>Cases found as substantiated</td>
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<td>Cases still in progress</td>
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<td>Targeted inspections/follow up inspections</td>
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<td>Total infringements found on all cases</td>
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<td>Corrective letters sent</td>
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<td>Total cases (complaints and inspections) handled</td>
<td>1,487</td>
<td>1,632</td>
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Annexes B and C

Complaints and inspections carried out (by industrial sector) from 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007

Infringements found (by industrial sector) from 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007

Note: EAS remit ceased to cover agricultural workers from 1 October 2006
Annexes D and E

Comparison of Infringements found by industrial sectors (%) between 2006/07 and 2005/06

Comparison of Complaints and inspections carried out by industrial sectors (%) between 2006/07 and 2005/06

Note: EAS remit ceased to cover agricultural workers from 1 October 2006