

CHAPTER 6

COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

6.1 In our Consultative Document we invited comments on the need to establish a procedure for receiving grievances or complaints in departments. The majority view from both management and staff is in favour of establishing such a procedure. However, views are somewhat divided on the actual format or system for this procedure. We have received proposals such as the establishment of an independent committee, a complaints office or unit, or simply providing direct access to the head of department for those staff who have a grievance or complaint to make.

6.2 We do not consider that it matters too much whether the procedure is formal or informal. To us, what is important is that it should be simple, effective, and well publicised. In this connection, we note that the Government Secretariat issued a General Circular on 25th April 1979 (General Circular No. 12/79) to which is attached a 'Guide on Departmental Complaints Procedures'. Although that Guide is primarily concerned with complaints by members of the public, we consider that it contains a number of useful suggestions which, suitably adapted, are equally applicable to complaints by civil servants.

Suggested Guidelines for dealing with complaints

6.3 In addition, we suggest the following guidelines for establishing a complaints/grievance procedure in departments :-

- (a) The responsibility for the handling of complaints and grievances could be taken up by the proposed Staff Relations-Management Units discussed in Chapter 5 where these exist, or a designated member of the senior management, preferably at Directorate level.
- (b) The complaints procedure should be as simple and direct as possible, and must be publicised widely and at periodic intervals (say once a year) so that all staff will be aware of its existence and use it whenever necessary. In other words, staff should be informed as to how, where, and to whom complaints may be made, particularly when complaints are made against their immediate supervisors.
- (c) The procedure must be speedy because any delay may undermine the staff's confidence in the system. As

far as practicable, a time-limit should be set for the handling of complaints. Where it appears that the investigation is likely to take a long time and the specified time-limit cannot be kept, the complainant should be given an interim reply.

- (d) Confidentiality must be preserved otherwise staff may be reluctant to voice their grievances for fear of victimisation.

Recommendation

6.4 In the interests of promoting staff relations and good management, we recommend that some form of complaints/grievance procedure, on the lines suggested above, should be instituted in all departments and publicised.