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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*



Providing Inspection Services for
**Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Evaluation of the

Education and Training Inspectorate's

Complaints Procedure

(2001/02-2003/04)

January 2006

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Education and Training Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) evaluates rigorously the quality of its services through a combination of internal and external evaluation processes. As part of these processes, the Inspectorate welcomes compliments, comments and complaints about the service it provides. These responses help the Inspectorate to recognise and build on its strengths, and to identify areas for improvement in the procedures and protocols for inspection.

1.2 In October 2002, the process for the handling of complaints was put on a more formal basis with the publication of the document, "Improving Inspection: Procedures for Handling Enquiries, Comments or Complaints". A copy of this document was sent to all organisations which the Inspectorate inspects, and an outline of the procedures was also included in the publications, "A Charter for Inspection" and "A Common Framework for Inspection". Since October 2002, and at the outset of every inspection activity, the Reporting Inspector (RI), the person who leads the inspection, provides a resume of the Complaints Procedure to the leader of the organisation being inspected.

1.3 This report outlines the findings of a survey which was undertaken in order to:

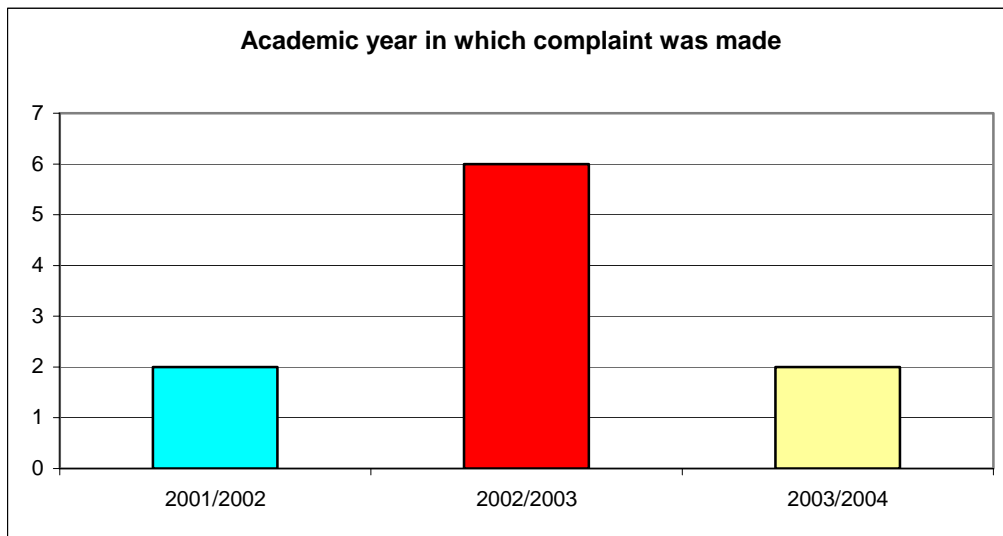
- evaluate the effectiveness of the published Complaints Procedure;
- identify strengths in the process;
- identify areas for development; and
- make recommendations for improvement.

1.4 The report covers the three academic years, 2001/2002, 2002/2003 and 2003/2004; during that time 21 complaints about the Inspectorate were received. As part of the survey, each of the 21 complainants was sent a postal questionnaire (Appendix 1). After the closing date for receipt of completed questionnaires, a follow-up letter was sent to give respondents a second chance to reply. In total, eleven questionnaires were returned, representing a return rate of just over 50%.

2. OUTCOMES FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRES

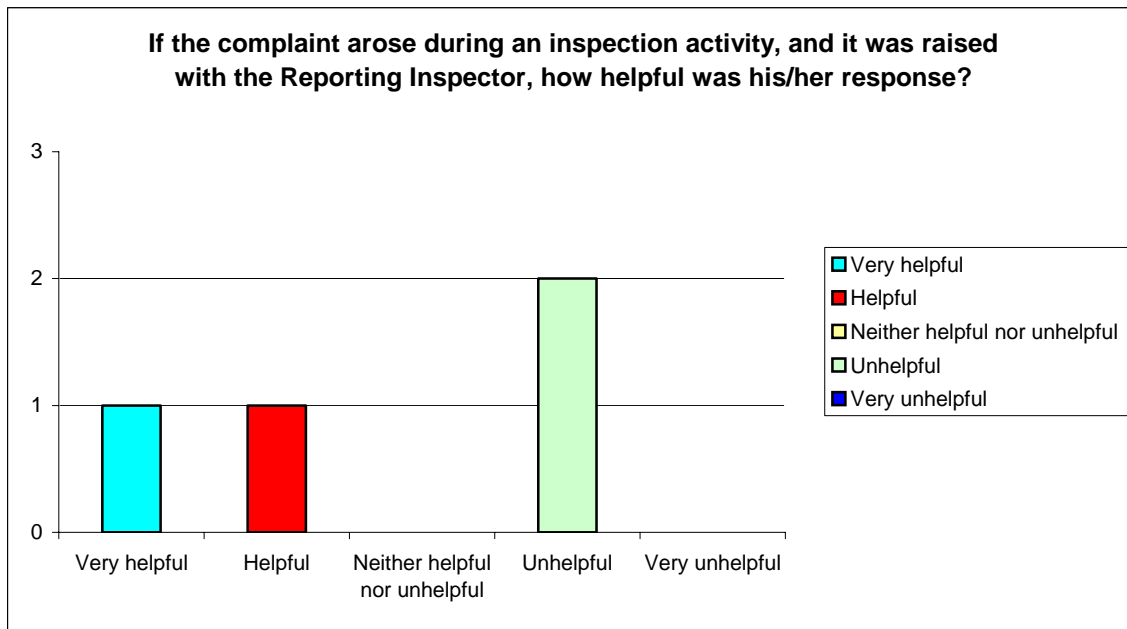
2.1 Of the eleven respondents, six had made their complaint in the 2002/2003 academic year, with two in each of the other two academic years covered by the report. The remaining respondent did not specify a time period. (Figure 1)

Figure 1



2.2 Where a complaint arises in the course of an inspection activity, the Complaints Procedure specifies clearly that the RI should take responsibility in the first instance for addressing the complaint. In the four instances where this occurred and the RI addressed the complaint, two complainants found the RI's response to be helpful or very helpful while two found the RI's response to be unhelpful. (Figure 2)

Figure 2

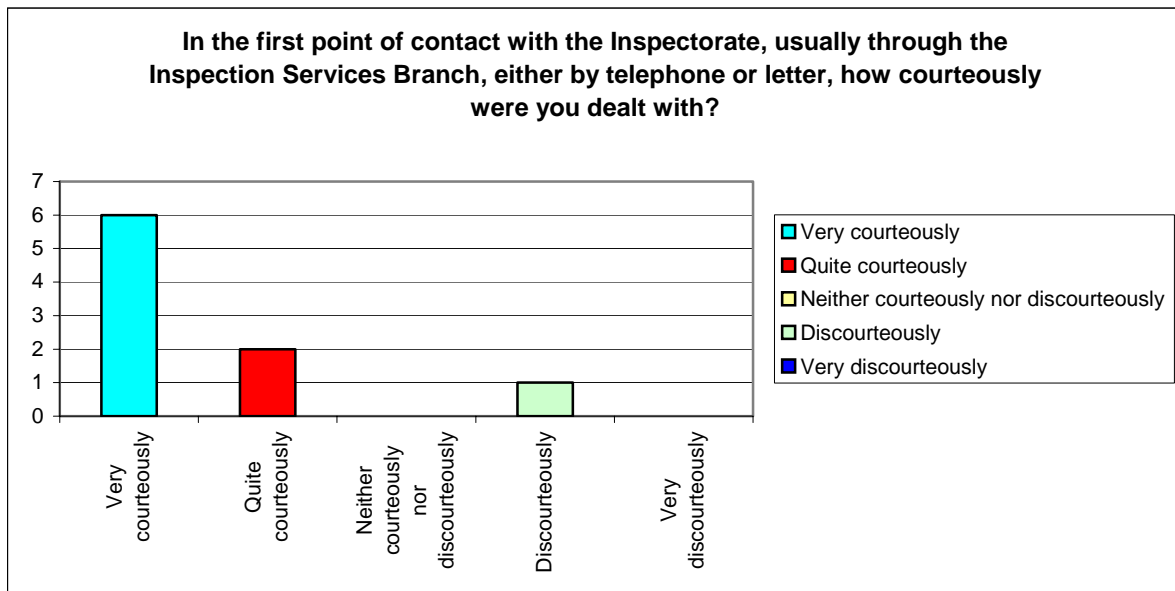


2.3 In one instance, the complaint concerned an inspector’s interaction with a teacher. By the time the inspector had been made aware of the problem, the teacher had left the school to go home; but the principal appreciated the inspector’s willingness to contact the teacher as soon as possible so that the precise nature of the complaint could be ascertained, thereby allowing the concern to be addressed. The two complainants who found the RI’s response less than helpful did not specify their reasons for describing the response in this way.

2.4 When the complainants have occasion to contact the Inspectorate by telephone, their first point of contact is usually with staff in the Inspection Services Branch (ISB). Of the nine respondents who contacted the Inspectorate in this manner, eight of them stated that they were dealt with very courteously. Only one recorded the response as discourteous (Figure 3).

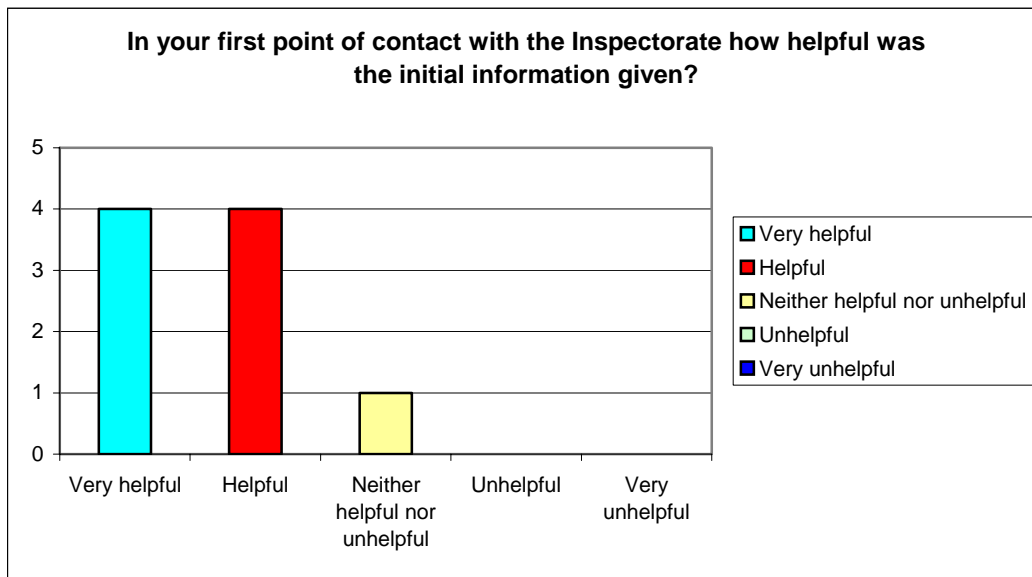
In the case of the single complainant in this category, their point of concern, as exemplified in their written comments, was the length of time taken by the Inspectorate to respond to their query.

Figure 3



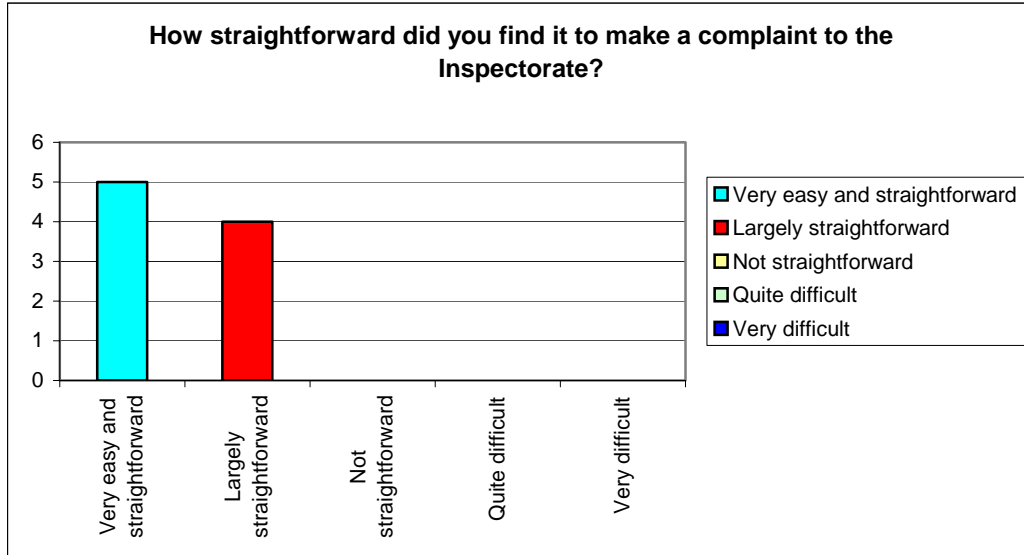
2.5 When complainants contact staff in ISB it is usually to seek information on how they might pursue their complaint. Once again, eight complainants, from the nine who had contacted the Inspectorate in this manner, stated that the information they were given was helpful or very helpful. (Figure 4)

Figure 4



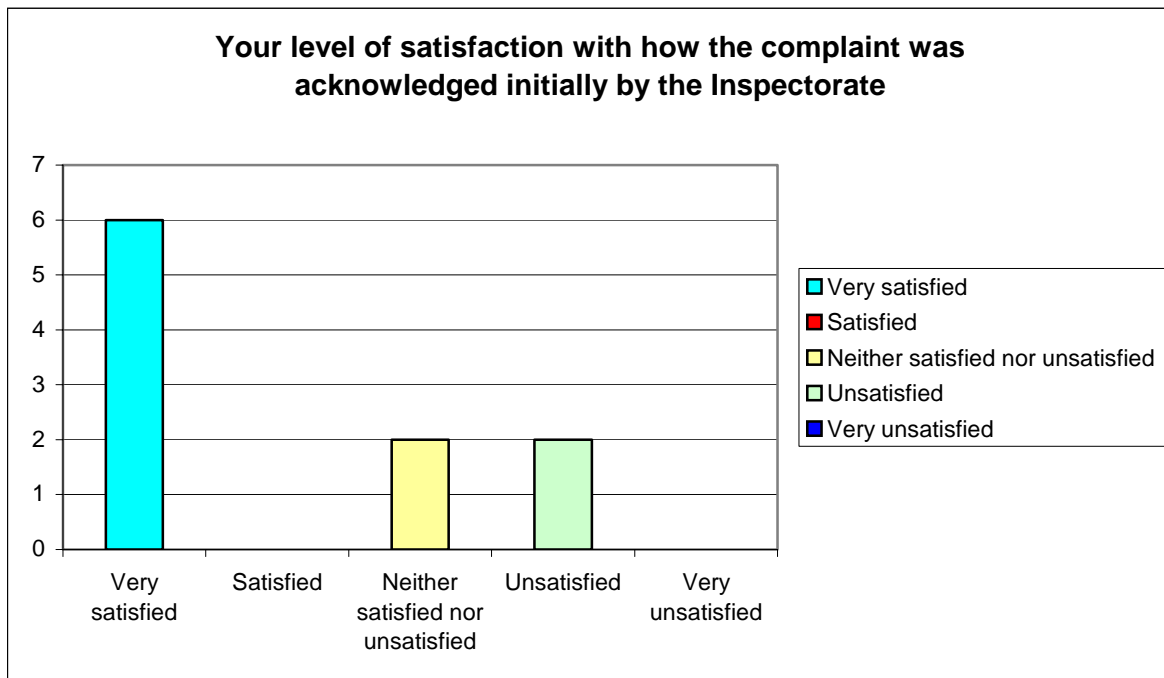
2.6 Further, nine of the eleven respondents stated that they found it straightforward when making a complaint. In particular, they found the complaints form simple and easy to understand and to complete. (Figure 5)

Figure 5



2.7 In having their complaint acknowledged initially by the Inspectorate, six complainants of the ten who recorded a response, stated that they were very satisfied with how the complaint was acknowledged; two were undecided and a further two were dissatisfied. (Figure 6)

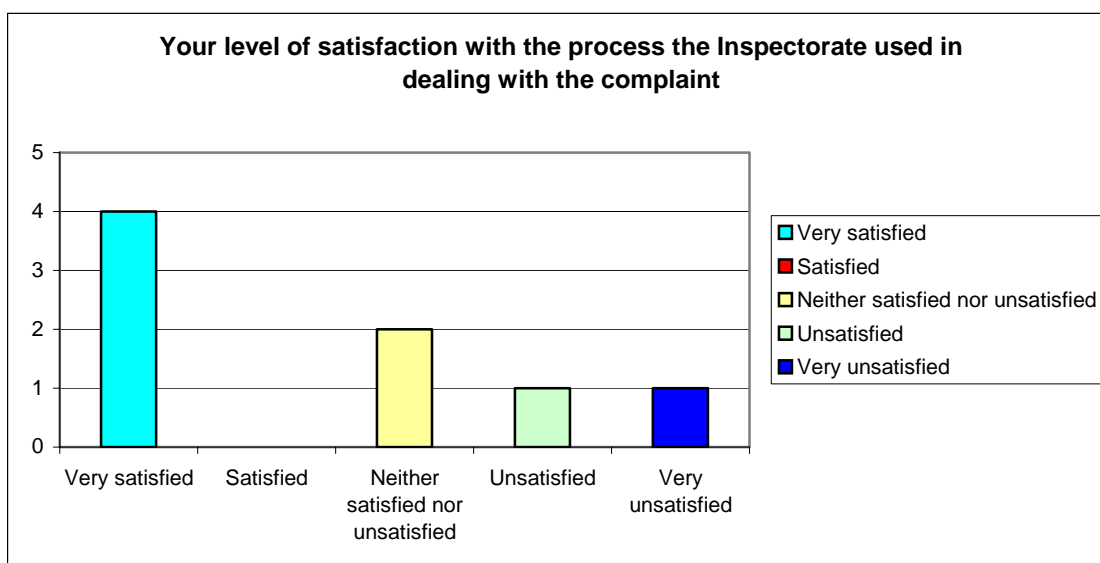
Figure 6



2.8 Typically, complainants stated that they found the Inspectorate very committed to resolving the issue raised. In the very small number of cases where respondents were less than satisfied they did not elaborate on the nature of their dissatisfaction.

2.9 When asked about their satisfaction with the process used by the Inspectorate in dealing with their complaint, four stated that they were very satisfied with the process while two stated that they were less than satisfied. (Figure 7)

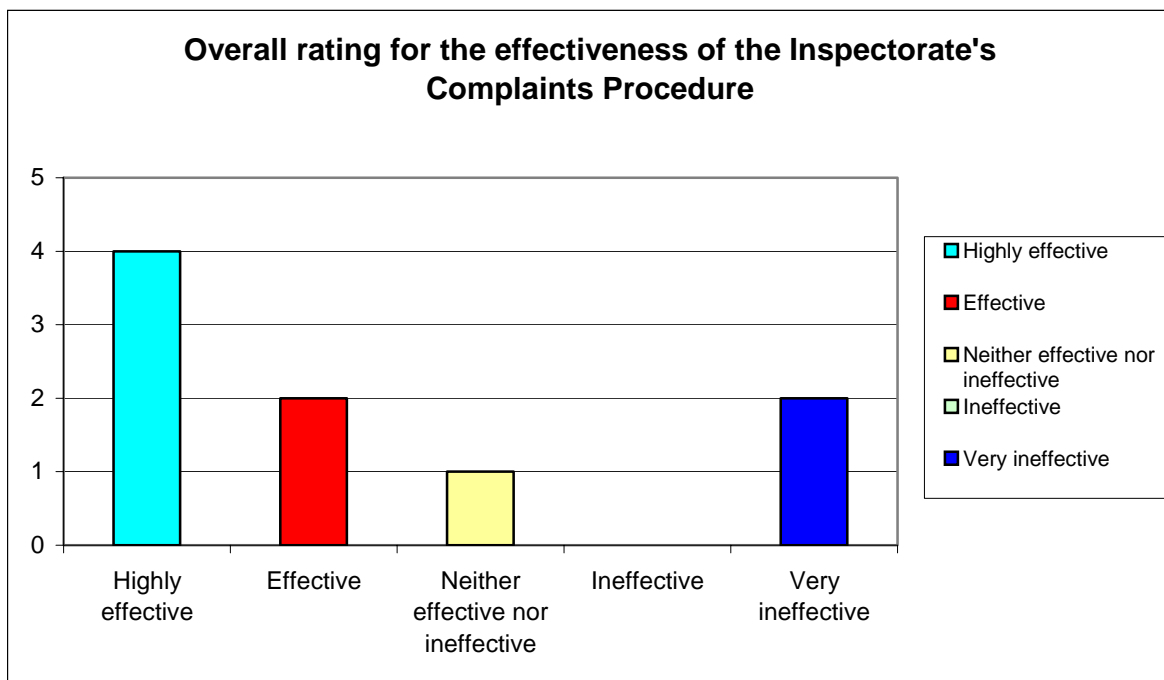
Figure 7



2.10 Where respondents were very satisfied, they indicated that the most effective manner in which to address the complaint was through a subsequent face-to-face discussion. In the cases where the complainants were not satisfied it was, in the main, due to a judgement that their complaint was not upheld.

2.11 Finally, through the questionnaire, complainants were asked to assess the overall effectiveness of the Inspectorate's Complaints Procedure. Six complainants judged the process to be effective or highly effective while two considered it to be ineffective. (Figure 8)

Figure 8



2.12 One respondent described the process as “faultless”. Another appreciated greatly the genuine efforts made by the Inspectorate to resolve the complaint including the detailed written response received. In the two instances where complainants rated the process as ineffective it was due to their complaint not being upheld, although they acknowledged that the process had been conducted and concluded according to the published procedures.

3. ACTIONS TAKEN TO DATE

3.1 As a result of ongoing evaluation of the Complaints Procedures some steps have already been taken to ensure that all those who wish to complain are aware of the procedures, and are dealt with in a professional and courteous manner.

3.2 These actions are:

- The RI records that the organisation has received a copy of a resume of the Complaints Procedure at the beginning of the inspection activity. This new approach is designed to ensure that the organisation to be inspected is fully aware of the existence of the Inspectorate's complaints procedure and of how to make a complaint.
- At the end of each day during the inspection, the RI liaises with the leader of the organisation being inspected in order to ensure that the leader is content with how the inspection is progressing. A record is kept of the outcomes of these liaison meetings.
- The RI ensures that any complaint during an inspection is dealt with as quickly and efficiently as possible. He/she will attempt to resolve the issue at source and by face-to-face contact to the satisfaction of all parties. If it is not possible to resolve the issue then the RI will ensure that the organisation is made fully aware of the next steps in the published complaints procedure.
- The Inspectorate quality assures, on an annual basis, the operation of its complaints procedure in order to ensure that it is followed rigorously, for instance with regard to the timescales for acknowledging/responding to complaints.
- A revised complaints procedures document, 'Procedures for Responding to Compliments, Comments, Enquiries and Complaints' was issued in 2004 after consultation with customers and stakeholders. The resume documents were updated in the light of the new procedures.

4. **FURTHER ACTION TO BE TAKEN**

4.1 As a result of the outcomes of this report the Inspectorate will:

- publish each year on the Inspectorate's website, www.deni.gov.uk, the outcomes of the review of the number and nature of complaints;
- undertake every three years, a review of customer satisfaction in handling complaints.

5. **CONCLUSION**

4.1 The Inspectorate welcomes the findings of this report as a basis for developing and improving further the service provided. While the outcomes are generally positive, nonetheless action will be taken, as necessary, to address the areas for improvement, and so enhance further the quality and effectiveness of the service which the organisation provides.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE QUESTIONNAIRE

EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSPECTORATE
(Inspectorate)

EVALUATING THE INSPECTORATE' S COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

In the questions below please tick your preferred response.

If you wish to add a written response to any of the questions please do so in the space provided.

1. In which academic year did you make your complaint?

- 2001/02
- 2002/03
- 2003/04

Comment:

2. If the complaint arose during an inspection activity, and you raised it initially with the Reporting Inspector, how helpful did you find his/her response?

- Very helpful
- Helpful
- Neither helpful nor unhelpful
- Unhelpful
- Very unhelpful

Comment:

3. How straightforward did you find it to make a complaint to the Inspectorate?

- Very easy and straightforward
- Largely straightforward
- Not straightforward
- Quite difficult
- Very difficult

Comment:

4. In your first point of contact with the Inspectorate, usually through the Inspection Services Branch, either by telephone or by letter, how courteously were you dealt with?

- Very courteously
- Quite courteously
- Neither courteously nor discourteously
- Discourteously
- Very discourteously

Comment:

5. Again, in your first point of contact with the Inspectorate how helpful was the initial information you were given?

- Very helpful
- Helpful
- Neither helpful nor unhelpful
- Unhelpful
- Very unhelpful

Comment:

6. How satisfied were you with how your complaint was acknowledged initially by the Inspectorate?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied
- Unsatisfied
- Very unsatisfied

Comment:

7. How satisfied were you with the process the Inspectorate used in dealing with your complaint?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied
- Unsatisfied
- Very unsatisfied

Comment:

8. If you were less than “satisfied” in question 7 with the process the Inspectorate used, which part of the Inspectorate’s procedures could be improved to address your concerns?

Comment:

9. In recent years the Inspectorate has developed a formal Complaints Procedure and has issued this to all organisations across the education, youth and training sectors. If, in making your complaint, you made use of these materials how helpful did you find them?

- Very helpful
- Helpful
- Neither helpful nor unhelpful
- Unhelpful
- Very unhelpful

Comment:

10. Overall, from initial contact with the Inspectorate through to closure how would you rate the effectiveness of the organisation's complaints procedures?

- Highly effective
- Effective
- Neither effective nor ineffective
- Ineffective
- Very ineffective

Comment:

11. If there is any other matter relating to the complaints procedure on which you wish to comment please do so below.

Comment:

12. As stated in the covering letter, some face-to-face interviews will be conducted as part of this evaluation. If your name were chosen at random would you be willing to participate in a short interview?

- Yes
 No

Finally, thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. The Inspectorate is committed to the review, development and improvement of all its processes and procedures. Your responses will help us significantly in this pursuit.

Please return the questionnaire in the pre-paid envelope provided **by 13 May 2005**.

Name (optional): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

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