

Collaboration and Access to Services

Effective engagement with key stakeholder groups is essential to the Office's achievement of positive complaint outcomes and improved public administration. The Office does this through:

- Working collaboratively with other integrity and accountability agencies - locally, nationally and internationally - to encourage best practice and leadership in the sector;
- Ensuring ongoing accessibility to its services for public authorities and the community; and
- Developing, maintaining and supporting relationships with public authorities and community groups.

Working Collaboratively

The Office works collaboratively with local, national and international integrity and accountability agencies to encourage best practice and leadership in the sector. Working collaboratively also provides an opportunity for the Office to benchmark its performance and stakeholder communication activities against other similar agencies, and to identify areas for improvement through the experiences of others.

Integrity Coordinating Group

Members:

Western
Australian
Ombudsman
Public Sector
Commissioner
Corruption and
Crime
Commissioner
Auditor General
Information
Commissioner

Background:

The Group was formed to promote and strengthen integrity in Western Australian public bodies.

The Office's involvement:

The Ombudsman participates as a member of the Group and the Office has nominated senior representatives who sit on the Group's joint working party to collaborate on shared initiatives.

2011-12 initiatives:

The Ombudsman's workshops on Good Administrative Decision making were revised during 2011-12 to incorporate the key principles in the *Integrity in Decision Making* product developed by the Group and ensure consistent information is provided to public authorities. The Office also coordinated the graduate program, which involves a graduate working in each of the member agencies over a two year period in total.

Public Sector Commission's Induction: Your Guide to Ethics and Integrity in the Public Sector Program

Background:

As part of the induction process for all new public officers, the Public Sector Commission holds a half-day module on ethics and integrity in the public sector. The sessions are available to all new public officers. Staff from the Public Sector Commission, the Ombudsman's office, the Corruption and Crime Commission and the Office of the Information Commissioner present at these sessions.

2010-11 Initiatives:

As a key integrity agency, the Office presented on four occasions during the year. The Office provides information to new public sector employees on *The Role of the Ombudsman* and how the Office may be able to assist them in their work. This program will continue into 2012-13.

Australia and New Zealand Ombudsman Association

Members:

Western Australian Ombudsman & Energy Ombudsman Western Australia
16 Parliamentary and industry-based Ombudsmen from Australia and New Zealand

Background:

The Association is a peak body industry group for Parliamentary and industry-based Ombudsmen in Australia and New Zealand. It acts as a network for consultation and discussion for Ombudsmen on matters of interest, concern or common experience.

The Office's involvement:

The Ombudsman sits on the Association's Executive. The Office regularly reports on its activities to the Association and also has nominated representatives who sit on interest groups in the areas of policy and research, first contact, public relations and communications and business services.

2011-12 initiatives:

The Ombudsman was involved in four scheduled meetings via teleconference during the year, attended the Association's Annual General Meeting and Executive Committee meeting. The Ombudsman also gave a presentation, [Growing pains – large increases in complaints and substantial variation in demand for Ombudsman services](#), chaired a session and was a panel member in the plenary closing session at the Association's 2012 conference in Melbourne in May 2012.

Information sharing with Ombudsmen from other jurisdictions

Background:

Where possible and practical, the Office aims to share information and insights about its work with Ombudsmen from other jurisdictions, as well as with other accountability and integrity agencies.

2011-12 Initiatives:

In November 2011, the Office hosted the annual Deputy Ombudsman's meeting attended by Deputy Ombudsmen from across Australia and in October 2011 the Office hosted a visit by the British Columbia Deputy Representative for Children and Youth. The Tasmanian Ombudsman's office also travelled to Western Australia to examine the Western Australian Ombudsman's complaint resolution processes and how these processes might be applied in Tasmania. Materials on the Office's complaint handling improvement program were shared with the Tasmanian Ombudsman's office.

Indonesian/ Australian Ombudsman Linkages and Strengthening Program

Members:

Western Australian Ombudsman

Commonwealth Ombudsman

New South Wales Ombudsman

Ombudsmen of the Republic of Indonesia

Background:

The program aims to provide access across a larger portion of Indonesia to more effective and sustainable Ombudsman and complaint management services.

The Office's involvement:

The Office has been involved with the program since 2005 and supports the program through staff placements in Indonesia and Australia.

2011-12 initiatives:

In July 2011, the Assistant Ombudsman Complaints Resolution visited Indonesia. The purpose of the visit was to work with Indonesia's incoming Ombudsmen, to develop a work program for the next phase of the program and to continue to evaluate outcomes from earlier program activities. In March 2012, the Indonesian anti-corruption body, KPK, visited the Western Australian Ombudsman to understand more about our role in handling complaints and accountable and transparent decision making in the public sector.

Providing Access to Key Stakeholders

Access to the Ombudsman's Services

The Office continues to implement a number of strategies to ensure its complaint services are accessible to all Western Australians. These include access through online facilities as well as more traditional approaches by letter and through visits to the Office. The Office also holds complaint clinics and delivers presentations to community groups, particularly through the Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program.

Access to the Office through online services is popular. This is further demonstrated by the increased use of online access this year. This year, for the first time, the number of people using email and on-line services to make a complaint is higher than those using letters.

Significant work was undertaken in relation to a series of new measures to ensure that the Office's services are as accessible as possible to children and young people.

Communicating with Complainants

The Office provides a range of information and services to assist specific groups and the public more generally to understand the role of the Ombudsman and the complaint process. Many people find the Office's enquiry service assists them to make their complaint. Other initiatives in 2011-12 include:

- Promotion of the Ombudsman's translated information sheets *How to complain to the Ombudsman* and *Complaints by overseas students*. Information is already available in a number of community languages and can be made available in specific languages on request;
- Ongoing promotion of the role of the Office and the type of complaints the Office handles through 'Ask the Ombudsman' on 6PR's Nightline Program; and
- Regular updating and simplification of the Ombudsman's website to provide easy access to information for people wishing to make a complaint and those undertaking the complaint process.

Liaison with Public Authorities

The Office liaises with various public authorities throughout the year to discuss case-specific information and to track issues and trends occurring within different sectors.

Liaison with the Public Sector

Corrective Services

Regular meetings were held with the Director General of Corrective Services and senior representatives of the Department's Professional Standards and Adult Custodial Divisions. In addition, the Office attended quarterly meetings with representatives of the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services. These meetings have proved useful in allowing both offices to become better informed of issues affecting the corrective services sector in Western Australia.

Department of Housing

During the year, discussions were held with senior staff within the Department of Housing to exchange information about the Office's own motion investigation on sleep related infant deaths. The Office also conducted a workshop on *Effective Decision Making* to Department of Housing staff in August 2011.

Department for Child Protection

Regular meetings were held with the Director General of the Department for Child Protection as well as monthly discussions with senior representatives from the Ombudsman's office and the Department for Child Protection. Discussions were also held during the year with senior staff within the Department to exchange information about the Office's own motion investigation on sleep related infant deaths

Liaison with the Local Government Sector

The Office continued to work on strengthening its liaison with the local government sector. Initiatives undertaken during the year include:

- In August 2011, the Office gave a presentation titled, *Overview of the Role of the Ombudsman* at the Western Australian Local Government Association Conference; and
- The Office also presented at the Local Government Managers Australia Customer Service Forum on *The Ombudsman's Role in Resolving Complaints*.

Liaison with the University Sector

A number of meetings and teleconferences were held with senior representatives from Curtin University, University of Western Australia and Murdoch University as well as interstate University representatives.

'Ask the Ombudsman' on Nightline

The Office continues to provide access to its services through the Ombudsman's regular appearances on Radio 6PR's *Nightline* program. Listeners who have complaints about public authorities or want to make enquiries have the opportunity to call in and speak with the Ombudsman live on air. The segment allows the public to communicate a range of concerns with the Ombudsman. The segment also allows the Office to communicate key messages about the State Ombudsman and Energy Ombudsman jurisdictions, the outcomes that can be achieved for members of the public and how public administration can be improved. The Ombudsman appeared on the 'Ask the Ombudsman' segment in September and November 2011 and March and June 2012.

Ombudsman Website

The [Western Australian Ombudsman website](#) provides a wide range of information and resources for:

- Members of the public on the complaint handling services provided by the Office as well as links to other complaint bodies for issues outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction;

- Public sector agencies on decision making, complaint handling and conducting investigations;
- Access to the Ombudsman's investigation reports such as the Report on *Planning for Children in Care*;
- The latest news on events and collaborative initiatives such as the Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program; and
- Links to other key functions undertaken by the Office such as the Energy Ombudsman website and related bodies including the Integrity Coordinating Group.

The website continues to be a valuable resource for the community and public sector as shown by the increased use of the website this year. In 2011-12:

- The number of hits to the website increased by 25% to 1,264,215 in 2011-12;
- The number of visitors also increased, particularly around the time of publication of Ombudsman investigation reports such as the Report on Planning for Children in Care;
- The top two most visited pages (besides the homepage) on the site were *What you can complain about* and *How to make a complaint*; and
- The Office's *Procedural Fairness* guidelines and *Guidelines on Complaint Handling* were the top two most viewed documents.



The website content and functionality are continually reviewed and improved to ensure there is maximum accessibility to all members of the diverse Western Australian community. The site provides information in a wide range of [community languages](#) and is accessible to people with disabilities.

Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program

The Office continued the Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program (**the Program**), with preparation underway for our visit to the Pilbara towns of South Hedland, Karratha, Roebourne and Marble Bar in August 2012. The Program is an important way for the Office to raise awareness of, access to, and use of, its services, for regional and Indigenous Western Australians.

While the Program is coordinated by the Ombudsman's Office, it generally incorporates the work of other integrity and accountability agencies including the Health and Disability Services Complaints Office, the Office of the Information Commissioner and the Commonwealth Ombudsman's office.

The Program enables the Office to deliver key messages about the Ombudsman's work and services, and also provides a valuable opportunity for staff to strengthen

their understanding of the issues affecting people in regional and Indigenous communities. The visits also highlight the important interaction of State and local governments in the provision of services to the communities.

Complaint forums enable members of local communities to speak with Ombudsman staff face-to-face about their issues and concerns and the Office provides advice about, and assists in resolving, many of the complaints made during the visit. The collaboration with other integrity and accountability agencies during regional visits and complaint clinics also assists in ensuring regional Western Australians can be easily referred to the most appropriate body to assist them.

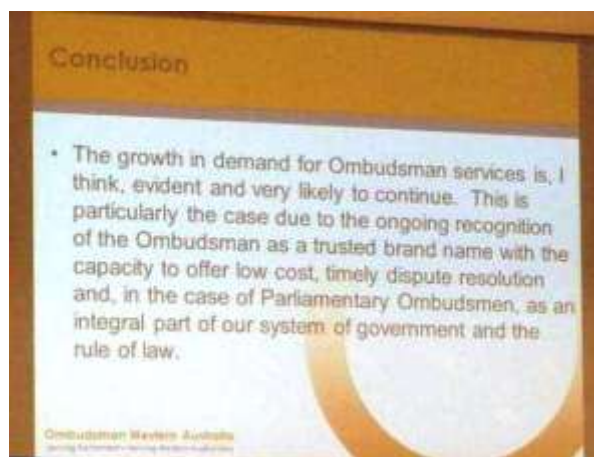
Presentations and Publications

Speeches and Presentations

The Ombudsman and other staff delivered speeches and presentations throughout the year at local, national and international conferences and events.

As well as the presentations and workshops designed to support improvements to public administration, provided in the [Own Motion Investigations and Administrative Improvement section](#), speeches and presentations by the Ombudsman and other staff of the Office included:

- A five day intensive unit 'Government Accountability – Law and Practice' co-ordinated by the Ombudsman and Professor Simon Young, Faculty of Law, University of Western Australia in February 2012;
- A presentation to the Public Sector Commission on achieving improved timeliness of complaint resolution in November 2011;



Above: an extract from Ombudsman, Chris Field's presentation at the 2012 ANZOA Conference in Melbourne. Photograph courtesy of ANZOA Secretariat.

- A presentation at the Australian Public Sector Anti Corruption Conference on complaint handling in November 2011;
- A presentation to the Indonesian anti-corruption body, KPK, on our role in handling complaints and accountable and transparent decision making in the public sector in March 2012; and
- A speech at the Australian and New Zealand Ombudsman Association (ANZOA) Conference on managing the large increases in complaints and variation in demand for Ombudsman services in May 2012.

The Ombudsman also delivered presentations in his role as the Energy Ombudsman including a speech at the Financial Counsellors' Association of Western Australia Annual Conference on the role of the Energy Ombudsman in September 2011.

Western Australian Ombudsman Newsletter

The *Western Australian Ombudsman Newsletter* is a key publication used by the Office to communicate information to its stakeholders about the Office's performance, achievements, events and resources. During the year, two editions of the newsletter were issued (July and December 2011).

The newsletter is distributed electronically to Members of Parliament, public authorities and interested members of the public and subscription to the newsletter from interested parties has increased steadily over the past year. The newsletter is published on the website after it is issued.



Publications

The Office has a comprehensive range of publications about the role of the Ombudsman to assist complainants and public authorities, which are available on the Ombudsman's website. For a full listing of the Office's publications, see [Appendix 3](#).

