

**Question 7**

In terms of the engagement with public organisations to ensure systemic change from VO investigations, enquiries, and alternative dispute resolution and complaints reviews, can the VO provide more detail as to how this approach was received and if this will remain an ongoing strategy of the VO?

**Response:**Investigations

When appropriate, VO has increasingly been holding meetings between agencies and investigators during investigations. Successful meetings have been held both online and in person. In some cases, meetings of this nature have circumvented the need for more time-consuming processes, such as lengthy enquiry letters, and have led to real time discussion about solutions to systemic problems. They can also result in improvements to systems, and resolution of complaints, while the investigation is ongoing. The Ombudsman's investigation into the Business Support Fund grant scheme is one such example.

This approach is consistent with the Ombudsman's desire to collaborate wherever practicable to achieve improvements in public administration.

Enquiries, ADR and Complaint Reviews

VO often receives positive feedback about its pragmatic approach to complaint handling. Nevertheless, to assess and verify complainant issues, VO enquiries can increase the workload of respondents which is not always viewed favourably. VO aims to make enquiries that are proportionate, targeted and do not place an unnecessary burden on the respondent.

Positive feedback is more often received for those complaints where non-written communication has occurred with a respondent agency. Online or in-person meetings, conciliation processes, or a complaints review, for example.

Conciliation is a new and important function to resolve complaints and improve public sector administration. Public authorities have found participation in conciliations to be an efficient, fair and objective way of resolving complaints, often resolving protracted disputes and re-establishing constructive relationships between both parties.

VO will continue to engage in a pragmatic approach to its complaint-handling and, when appropriate, engage in discussions about complaints with respondent agencies through meetings, conciliations and complaint reviews.