

Compensating Victims of Violent Crime



Report by the
Comptroller and Auditor General

Home Office

Compensating Victims of Violent Crime

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Comptroller and Auditor General

National Audit Office
4 April 2000

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Contents

Executive summary	1
Main conclusions	2
<hr/>	
Part 1: Introduction	7
The Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme	7
Eligibility criteria and the tariff	8
Organisation of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme	11
Applying for criminal injuries compensation	13
Workload and applicants	15
Scope of the National Audit Office examination	17
Methodology	18
<hr/>	
Part 2: Communicating with applicants	19
Whether the scheme is easily understood by applicants	19
Applicants' awareness of the scheme	21
Keeping applicants informed about their case	27
Explaining decisions	28
Treating applicants with consideration	32
Plans to provide electronic services	33
Recommendations	35
<hr/>	
Part 3: Deciding an application	37
Experience and training of the Authority's staff	37
Quality management	40
Combating fraud	43
Recommendations	44
<hr/>	
Part 4: How quickly applications for compensation are processed	46
Speed of resolving applications	46
Performance against targets	48
Applicants' views on the time taken to resolve applications	50
Factors affecting the resolution of applications	52

Factors affecting reviews	60
Factors affecting appeals	62
Recommendations	64

Part 5: Processing applications **66**

Current levels of processing efficiency	66
External comparisons with insurance companies	66
Comparison of unit administration costs under the current and previous schemes	67
Unit administrative costs by processing stage	68
Achievement of processing targets	70
The Authority's Glasgow and London offices	73
Improving processing efficiency	74
Recommendations	78

Appendices

1. Study methodology	80
2. Survey of applicants for criminal injuries compensation	84
3. Questionnaire survey of police forces	94

List of Figures **Page**

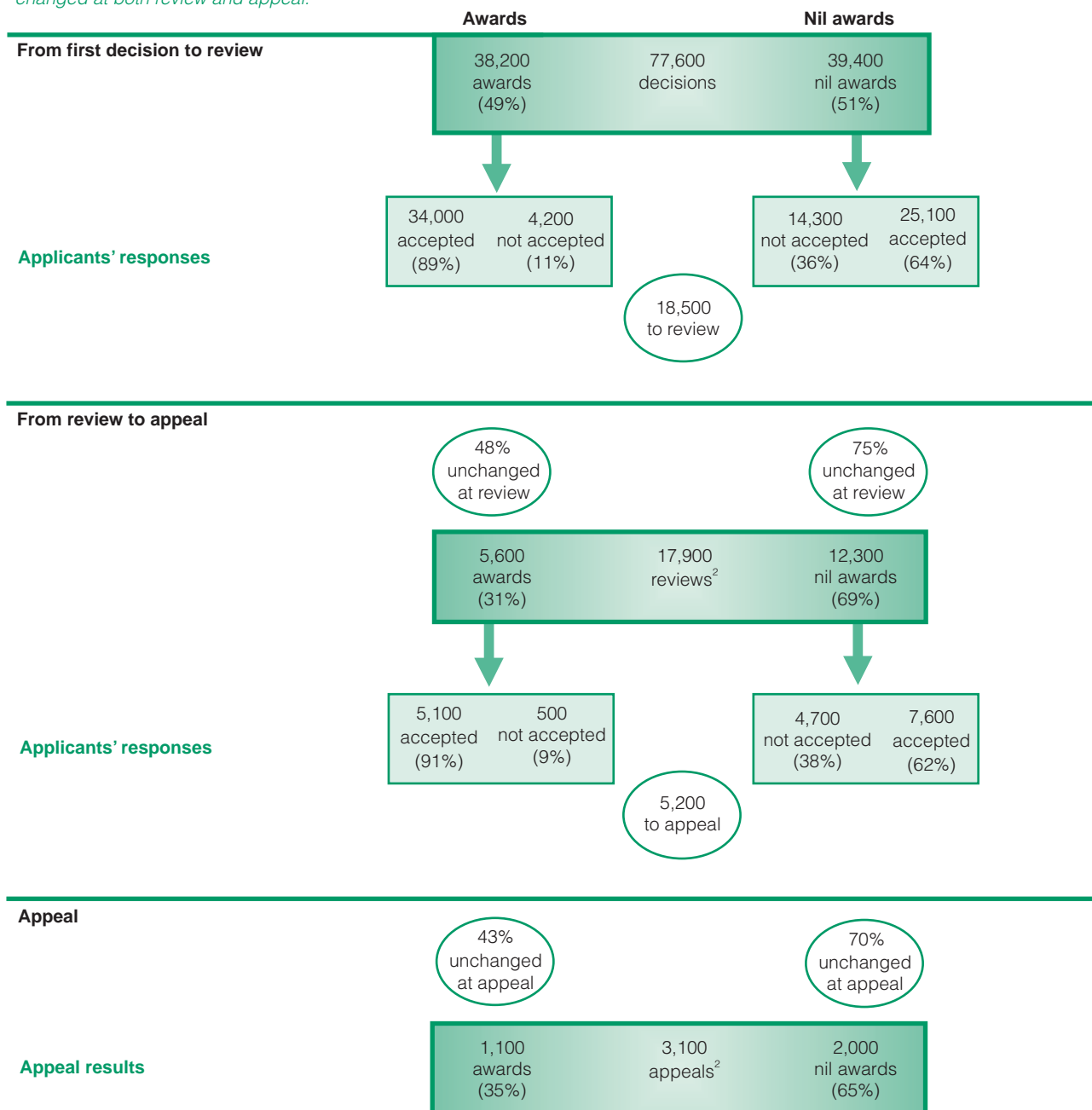
1 Outcome of applications decided under the tariff - based compensation scheme during 1998-99	
2 Eligibility criteria for awards under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme	9
3 Amounts awarded under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme, 1998-99	10
4 Organisational structure underpinning the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme	12
5 Applications may be resolved at one of three stages	14
6 Trends in crimes of violence against the person and applications for criminal injuries compensation	16
7 Nature of incidents giving rise to applications for compensation	17
8 Applicants' awareness of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme	22
9 Comparison of the age and gender composition for adult victims of crimes of violence and applicants for criminal injuries compensation	23
10 Applications in 1998-99 compared with violent crime reported in 1997-98	24
11 Applications for criminal injuries compensation by region	26
12 Applicants' views about the way the Authority dealt with their enquiries	27

List of Figures continued	Page
13 Reasons for refusals of applications for criminal injuries compensation, 1998-99	28
14 Extracts from letters to an applicant conveying the decisions of the Authority and the Appeals Panel	30
15 Applicants' views about how well the Authority and the Appeals Panel explained the reasons for decisions	31
16 Key principles for the development of an active website	34
17 Use of discretion relating to an applicant's conduct or record, resulting in a refusal or a reduced award at first decision	40
18 Processing speeds during 1998-99	47
19 Cases awaiting a decision by decision stage, 1997 to 1999	48
20 Performance against speed of processing targets in 1997-98 and 1998-99	49
21 Applicants' views on the time taken to resolve applications	51
22 Time spent at different stages of first decision	53
23 Speed of receipt of both police and medical reports	54
24 Automatic reminders for police reports, 1998-99	55
25 Automatic reminders for medical reports, 1998-99	56
26 Impact of requests for additional information on average length of case	58
27 Time taken to request and receive additional information	59
28 Staff numbers compared to complement, April 1998 to June 1999	60
29 Time taken to issue a decision after receipt of last piece of information	61
30 Processing times by length of case at review	62
31 Processing times by length of case for appeals	63
32 Processing activities at appeal: the Authority's Presenting Officers Unit and the Appeals Panel	63
33 Comparison of productivity in processing compensation applications with that of three private sector insurance companies	67
34 Unit administration costs per case resolved, 1993-94 to 1998-99 (1998-99 prices)	68
35 Composition of average unit administrative costs by processing stage for cases resolved in 1998-99	69
36 Performance against cost targets, 1996-97 to 1998-99	71
37 Performance against targets for case resolutions, 1996-97 to 1998-99	72
38 Productivity and unit administration costs in the Authority's Glasgow and London offices, 1998-99	73
39 How a call centre might be used for applications under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme	75

Figure 1

Outcome of applications decided under the tariff-based compensation scheme during 1998-99¹

In 1998-99, 77,600 first decisions resulted in 40,200 accepted awards or awards on appeal (left hand side of figure: 34,000 plus 5,100 plus 1,100). Award offers were more likely to be accepted than nil awards (right hand side). Nil awards were less likely to be changed at both review and appeal.



Notes: 1. Figures relate to cases where a response was received from the applicant accepting or rejecting a decision.
2. As many cases span more than one year, the throughput illustrated above does not relate precisely to 1998-99. Reviews requested are not identical to reviews undertaken. Factors including time lags during the build up of the scheme account for the substantial difference between appeal requests and appeals determined.

Executive summary

1 The Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme has existed since 1964 to compensate blameless victims of violent crime. The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority administers the scheme from its offices in Glasgow and London. Applications are determined on the basis of evidence obtained from applicants, the police, medical bodies and others, such as witnesses to the incident. An independent Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel adjudicates cases where the applicant is not satisfied with the Authority's decision, usually through an oral hearing.

2 Since 1996 the scheme has been based on a statutory scale of awards (known as the "tariff"), related to the severity of the injury. In 1998-99, £195 million was paid to 46,000 successful applicants, of which £114 million went to 40,000 applicants under the tariff-based scheme, and £81 million was in respect of the applications still outstanding under the pre-1996 scheme.

3 Not all applicants are found to be eligible for an award. In 1998-99, there were nearly 80,000 applications for compensation. Figure 1 shows how cases move through the Authority's and Appeals Panel's processes, with just over half of applicants ultimately receiving a compensation award.

4 The tariff-based scheme was introduced with the aims of slowing the increase in overall costs, making those costs more predictable and controllable, and making the scheme simpler to administer and easier to understand than the previous scheme, which was based on common law. During the period in which we examined the Authority's operations, the pre-1996 criminal injuries compensation scheme and the new tariff-based scheme were operating in parallel, and the Authority's performance in processing applications under the new scheme was therefore affected by the need to continue to clear cases under the earlier scheme.

5 Our report examines the quality of customer service, focusing on the effectiveness of communication with applicants (Part 2); the consistency and fairness of decisions (Part 3); and the speed of processing applications for compensation (Part 4). Part 5 of the report examines efficiency and provides the results of our benchmarking of the Authority's productivity and processes. We compared the Authority against three private sector insurance companies dealing with claims for personal injuries.

6 Whilst, overall, the Authority compared well with the private sector comparators, our examination of systems and processes drew some lessons from the private sector in relation to customer service, improved efficiency and more effective management of the Authority's workload. We consider that these could be developed to release resources to enable improvements in performance. For example we suggest that the Authority should investigate the costs and benefits of a telephone call centre. A call centre would have a range of benefits that would need to be weighed against the associated costs. It would improve customer service and could assist in screening out some of the applications that do not ultimately result in an award (Figure 1).

7 The potential benefits from reducing the number of ineligible applications, for example through improving the scheme's application form and guidance and the use of a call centre, are difficult to quantify. As an illustration, even if the Authority were to screen out only some of the simpler cases that are least likely to go beyond the first decision (Figure 1), a 10 per cent reduction in applications would release additional staff effort worth almost £0.5 million a year.

Main conclusions

8 Nearly 60 per cent of applicants responding to our survey had become aware of the scheme within one week of the incident, or were already aware of the scheme: a majority through the police and the charity, Victim Support. However, more than one in ten did not learn of the scheme until six months or more after the incident. Awareness is not uniform across Britain: levels of applications relative to recorded violent crimes are much higher in the area from the West Midlands to the north of England. The Authority does not monitor the ethnicity of applicants, so it is not possible to assess the awareness of the scheme among ethnic minority communities.

9 The Authority's staff are perceived to be helpful and considerate in the handling of applications, and the level of complaints is low. However, there is scope to improve communications with applicants while their applications are being considered. At the moment, applicants are not given a view of how long the decision might be expected to take, and are not routinely informed about progress and reasons for any delays.

10 Most surveyed applicants who had seen the Authority's guidance on the scheme found it, and the application form, helpful. However, one in ten felt they could be improved, a view shared by victims' representatives. None of the scheme's guidance is available in a language other than English. The Authority's

other written communications require improvement. For example, decision letters do not always explain clearly the reason for the decision, and may lead to applicants contesting a decision that they do not understand.

11 Although the tariff and the scheme's criteria provide some certainty, the Authority's staff usually need to exercise discretion, for example in determining whether to refuse or reduce an award where the applicant's conduct may have contributed to the incident which led to the injury. Overall, we conclude that the Authority has appropriate training and procedures to provide for consistent treatment of applicants.

12 A majority (around two-thirds) of decisions are upheld at review or appeal and our case examination suggested that only a minority of changes are attributable to the quality of the original decision. Even so, we consider that the quality of decision-making would be further improved if the allocation of cases took account of caseworkers' levels of experience and the complexity of the application or its likely eligibility, and if the Authority's processes generated systematic feedback to staff on changes to their decisions.

13 Our case examination showed that new evidence is often provided after the first decision has been taken, at the review or appeal stage, and that this appears to be a common reason why first decisions are changed. Encouraging applicants to provide all relevant information from the start therefore needs to be accorded a high priority, since it would minimise the extent to which decisions have to be changed later because significant new facts have emerged.

14 Apart from pilot exercises in July 1999 and February 2000, the Authority has undertaken no systematic quality assurance reviews of decision-making. The work of its Security and Quality Unit has concentrated on detecting and reducing the risk of fraud, including internal frauds by members of its own staff.

15 Overall, applications under the tariff-based scheme are processed more quickly than those under the previous scheme, for which around 40 per cent of applications and 50 per cent of appeals had been taking more than 12 months to resolve. During 1998-99, the Authority took, on average, 8.4 months to process an application under the tariff-based scheme from receipt to the issue of a decision (known as the "first decision"). Where applicants contest the outcome, the decision is reviewed – a new process under the tariff-based scheme. Reviews took a further six months, on average, from the receipt of a request for a review to the issue of a review decision. Cases which were still contested and went on to appeal took nearly eight months from the receipt of an appeal to the Appeals Panel's decision.

16 We estimate that the average time taken for the resolution of a typical case was 11.7 months, which included more than a month during which the Authority was awaiting the applicant's responses. For cases not resolved until appeal, the average time from initial application to an appeal hearing was 25 months. From our survey of applicants, opinions on the timeliness of the Authority's handling of applications were evenly spread, but a quarter of respondents felt that their case had taken much longer to resolve than they had expected.

17 The Authority and the Appeals Panel attribute delays in dealing with cases at review and appeal mainly to shortages of Authority staff undertaking reviews and preparing cases for appeal hearings, and the Authority has diverted resources into these activities. More than three-quarters of those cases where a review is requested are from applicants contesting a "nil award". The same applies at appeal, with 90 per cent of appeals relating to nil awards that have been confirmed at review. Reviews and appeals both confirm around two-thirds of all referred decisions, with nil awards more likely to be upheld at both stages than decisions with awards attached (Figure 1).

18 The average (inflation-adjusted) unit cost of settling applications for criminal injuries compensation under the tariff-based scheme is about a fifth lower than costs under the previous scheme, at about £245 in 1998-99. However, the cumulative costs of cases going on to appeal were high in 1998-99, approaching £1,400 on average, including costs of more than £1,100 at the appeal stage itself. These costs were higher than the costs under the previous scheme partly because only around half of the planned number of appeals were concluded in that year, and because of changes in the cost base, with the Appeals Panel now a separate, independent body bearing its own overheads.

19 Our comparison of the performance of the Authority's two offices found that the Glasgow office has higher productivity and lower costs than the London office. The Authority cannot recruit staff directly and appoints staff on loan from the Home Office and the Scottish Executive. This reduces its ability to employ and retain the kind of staff most suited to its work, particularly in London.

Key recommendations

20 Detailed recommendations are set out at the end of Parts 2 to 5 of this report. The key recommendations draw on the main conclusions of our examination and reflect the *Modernising Government* agenda, particularly in suggesting improvements in the Authority's focus on customers.

- i) The Authority should examine staffing needs in all parts of its operation, particularly on reviews and the preparation of appeals, and should consider any potentially beneficial reallocation of resources. Though, in the short term, the scope for simple reallocation between one part of the process to another is likely to be limited, there are prospects for workload reductions in the medium and longer term, for example once there are no remaining applications to be dealt with under the previous scheme. The Authority should discuss with the Home Office (and, as appropriate, the Scottish Executive) issues of complement, recruitment and retention of staff, and the business case for new working practices, as well as the areas for improved efficiency identified in this report.
- ii) The Home Office and Scottish Executive should consider giving the Authority greater responsibility for recruiting and selecting staff so that it can take a more active role in building a stable and skilled workforce.
- iii) Much could be gained from giving potential applicants concise, accessible information, particularly on eligibility, to help them to take an informed view on whether to make an application. Similarly, applicants need convincing explanations of the reasons for nil awards or the size of awards offered, to help them to take an informed view of whether to accept the decision. The Authority needs to assess the resources required to improve its communication with applicants, including the training of its staff. In implementing any changes, it should seek to improve provision for people whose first language is not English.
- iv) The Authority should monitor the characteristics of applicants, including ethnicity, to establish whether there are differences in application rates between different ethnic groups, which need to be addressed by better targeting of some groups to improve awareness to the scheme.
- v) The Authority should develop further its quality assurance of decision-making. Quality assurance should underpin the Authority's working practices by providing evidence of quality across all its caseload and generating information to help staff improve their performance. The Authority should explore key issues through its quality assurance. For example, first decisions which are altered at review or appeal because new information is made available should be examined to identify instances where applicants could have provided more complete information at an earlier stage.

- vi) The Authority has made some progress in implementing team-based working. We consider that this could usefully be expanded to help achieve greater continuous improvement and learning, for example from the results of quality assurance. Team-based targets would provide an extra incentive for staff to share their knowledge and expertise.

- vii) The Authority should pilot alternatives for streamlining the processing of applications. For example, staff leading the Authority's caseworking teams should be encouraged to increase the level of screening of applications with a view to allocating them to the staff with the most appropriate level of experience to deal with them. A telephone call centre would assist applicants in submitting eligible and appropriately evidenced applications, and at the same time discourage callers from submitting clearly ineligible applications.

Part 1: Introduction

1.1 Of the 35,000 offenders who were sentenced by courts for crimes of violence against the person in 1997, 35 per cent were ordered to pay compensation to victims, assessed by reference to the offender's ability to pay, resulting in an average compensation order of £260. But offenders are not always caught or even identified, and many lack the means to compensate their victims. Successive governments have taken the view that it is right for public feelings of responsibility for, and sympathy with, the blameless victim of a violent crime to be reflected in a monetary award on behalf of the community.

1.2 Each year almost a quarter of the victims of reported violent crimes seek compensation under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme. Less serious criminal injuries may not be compensated under the scheme. The minimum award is £1,000 and is paid in respect of an injury serious enough to justify such an amount. This report is about the service provided to applicants and the administration of the scheme. We examined the arrangements to ensure fairness and consistency in compensation awards and efficient processing of applications.

The Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

1.3 The current, tariff-based Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme took effect from 1 April 1996. It provides compensation to blameless victims who have sustained injuries in crimes of violence and those injured in trying to apprehend criminals or prevent crime. In cases where the victim has died, the scheme extends to bereaved relatives in the immediate family, and may pay funeral costs in all eligible cases. The scheme applies to injuries sustained in England, Scotland and Wales, regardless of the victim's nationality. There are separate arrangements in Northern Ireland. Since 1964, when the scheme was first introduced, around 750,000 victims have received compensation payments totalling £2 billion. In 1998-99, there were 78,900 applications for compensation, and £195 million was paid to 46,000 applicants, equivalent to an average compensation payment of £4,200. The scheme is administered by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority.

1.4 Of the £195 million awarded to applicants in 1998-99, £81 million (41 per cent) was paid in respect of outstanding cases under the former scheme. These tend to be the larger, more complex cases which have taken a long time to resolve. The former scheme was introduced in 1964, with compensation being assessed on the basis of common law (what the applicant could expect to be

awarded in a successful action for damages in the civil courts). The link with common law was broken under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act 1995. Applications lodged before April 1996 continued to be resolved under the old scheme by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, which remained in existence until 31 March 2000 when all but around 6,000 cases under the scheme were expected to be resolved. The Board also dealt with appeals under the previous scheme. It was a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Home Office with a contribution from the Scottish Executive. Members of the Board were senior legal practitioners. Administrative support to the Board was provided by the staff of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority.

1.5 The Government gave two reasons for establishing the tariff-based scheme.

- It would help to stop the costs of the scheme rising at a rate that was no longer sustainable for a scheme funded from taxation, and would make these costs more predictable and controllable.
- It would provide a better service to applicants because the scheme would be simpler and quicker to administer and easier for applicants to understand than the previous common law scheme.

Eligibility criteria and the tariff

1.6 To succeed, an application must satisfy basic eligibility criteria (Figure 2). Compensation is assessed on the basis of a tariff (or scale) of awards for injuries of comparable severity. There are some 400 injury descriptions ranked against 25 levels (or bands) of award (Figure 3). Awards range from £1,000 for a Level 1 injury, for example a fractured rib, to £250,000 for a Level 25 award, for example paralysis of all four limbs. If more than one injury is sustained, compensation comprises a payment of 100 per cent of the tariff for the most serious injury plus additional payments of, respectively, 10 per cent and 5 per cent of the tariffs for the second and third most serious injuries. The majority of awards made under the scheme are for injuries under Levels 1 to 5 of the tariff bands, involving payments of £1,000 to £2,000 (Figure 3). In 1998-99, three maximum awards of £250,000 were made. Examples of awards are shown in Cases 1 to 3.

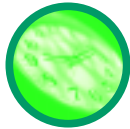
Eligibility criteria for awards under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Figure 2



Nature of Injury

The injury must be attributable to a crime of violence and be serious enough to qualify for at least the minimum award available under the scheme (£1,000).



Timing

The injury must have occurred after 1 August 1964. The application must be received within two years of the date of the incident causing the injury, unless the Authority is satisfied that there is good reason for the delay and that the case can still be substantiated.



Location

The injury must have been sustained in England, Scotland or Wales.



Discretion

The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority also has discretion to refuse or reduce an award on the following grounds:

- the applicant's conduct before, during or after the incident leading to the injury;
- the applicant's character as shown by his/her criminal convictions or other evidence;
- if the applicant failed to report the crime without delay; or
- if the applicant failed to co-operate with the police or the Authority.

Source: Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority

Amounts awarded under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme, 1998-99

Figure 3

Most awards are in the range £1,000 to £2,000.

Level	Award Band (£) ¹	Number of Awards	% of all awards ²
1 to 5	1,000 - 2,000	26,270	65
6 to 10	2,500 – 5,000	10,225	25
11 to 13	6,000 – 10,000	3,202	8
14 to 18	12,500 – 25,000	448	1
19 to 23	30,000 – 100,000	16	0
24 to 25	175,000 – 250,000	3	0
All		40,164	100

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority management information

Notes: 1. These figures relate to the *tariff* element of the award, excluding loss of earnings and care costs.
2. The percentages add up to less than 100 due to rounding.

Cases 1 to 3

A victim, a taxi-driver, was shot by a client and suffered scarring of the neck. An award of £1,500 (Level 3) was made.

A victim was struck violently outside a store and suffered a fractured jaw from which a full recovery was subsequently made. The Level 7 award of £3,000 was reduced by £80 to take account of court compensation received.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of a sample of applications

A victim was attacked after leaving a night club, sustaining minor facial injuries (Level 3: £1,500) and an injury requiring dental treatment (Level 1: £1,000). The potential award of £1,600 (£1,500 + 10% of £1,000) was reduced by 25% to £1,200 on the grounds that the applicant's conduct had contributed to the incident.

1.7 Where an injury is sufficiently serious to cause incapacity for more than 28 weeks, victims can receive additional compensation for loss of earnings (or potential earnings) and for the costs of special care and equipment. In fatal cases, qualifying dependants or relatives each receive a standard sum of £5,000 (or £10,000 if there is only one such person), with additional payments in respect of funeral expenses, loss of financial dependency or support, and the cost of replacing a deceased parent's services. These additional payments can raise the total amount payable in an individual case to £500,000, which is the maximum award payable under the tariff-based scheme.

1.8 In March 1999, the Government issued a consultation paper *Compensation for victims of violent crime*, inviting views on ways in which the tariff-based scheme could be changed to create a better deal for victims within the existing resources and structure of the scheme. The Government is considering responses to the consultation paper and suggestions for extending or altering the scheme including:

- updating the tariff in line with inflation each year;
- removing the maximum cap for awards;
- raising awards for victims of sexual crime and/or physical abuse; and
- raising the lower limit by cutting out some of the lower tariff bands, releasing funds which could be concentrated on the more seriously injured victims who are arguably in greater need of support.

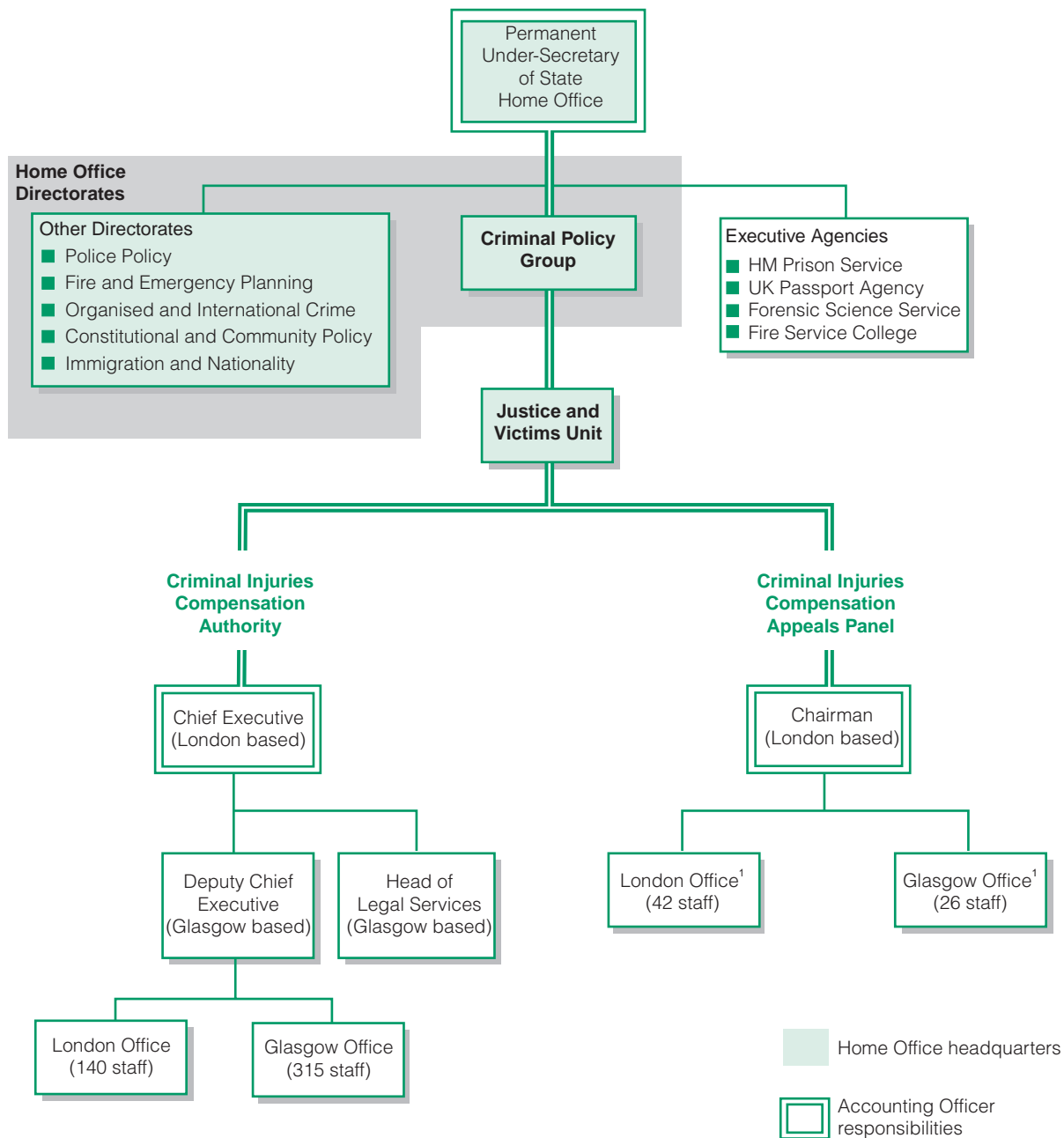
Organisation of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

1.9 The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (the Authority) is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Home Office. Applicants dissatisfied with the Authority's decisions may appeal to the independent Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel (the Appeals Panel). Following the winding up of the Board at the end of March 2000 (paragraph 1.4), the estimated 6,000 cases outstanding under the previous scheme will be resolved by the Appeals Panel.

1.10 The Appeals Panel is also a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Home Office and is a non-statutory tribunal. It is overseen by the Council on Tribunals, which is an Associated Office of the Lord Chancellor's Department that advises government departments about the running of tribunals. Both the Authority and the Appeals Panel are funded by the Home Office, with a contribution from the Scottish Executive. Their position in the Home Office, is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Organisational structure underpinning the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme



Note: 1. In addition to these administrative staff, the Appeals Panel comprises 50 adjudicators.

Source: Home Office

1.11 Though the tariff-based scheme is a statutory scheme, neither the Authority nor the Appeals Panel has a statutory basis, and they cannot employ staff directly. Staff of the Authority and Appeals Panel are loaned from either the Home Office or the Scottish Executive. The Authority's Chief Executive, appointed by the Permanent Secretary of the Home Office, is accountable to the Director of Criminal Policy in the Home Office on operational matters, but, as the Authority's Accounting Officer, is responsible directly for its efficient and effective use of resources. A quarterly meeting chaired by the Criminal Policy Director monitors the Authority's and the Appeals Panel's performance. The Appeals Panel is headed by a Chairman, who is appointed by the Home Secretary.

1.12 The Authority has around 450 staff divided between offices in London and Glasgow. The London office deals with applications from London and the South East; the Glasgow office deals with applications from the rest of England, and from Scotland and Wales. In 1998-99, the Authority's administrative costs were £16 million, including the cost of administration of cases under the previous common law scheme on behalf of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board (paragraph 1.4). The Board comprised senior legal professionals, and its specific costs were £3.2 million.

1.13 The Appeals Panel comprises around 70 administrative staff and 50 adjudicators, who decide appeals usually through panels which consider the appeal. The adjudicators are recruited by the Home Office and the Scottish Executive through national advertisements, and bring a mix of legal, medical, commercial and industrial experience. In 1998-99, the Panel's administrative costs were £2.4 million, which included £0.5 million for Panel members' daily fees.

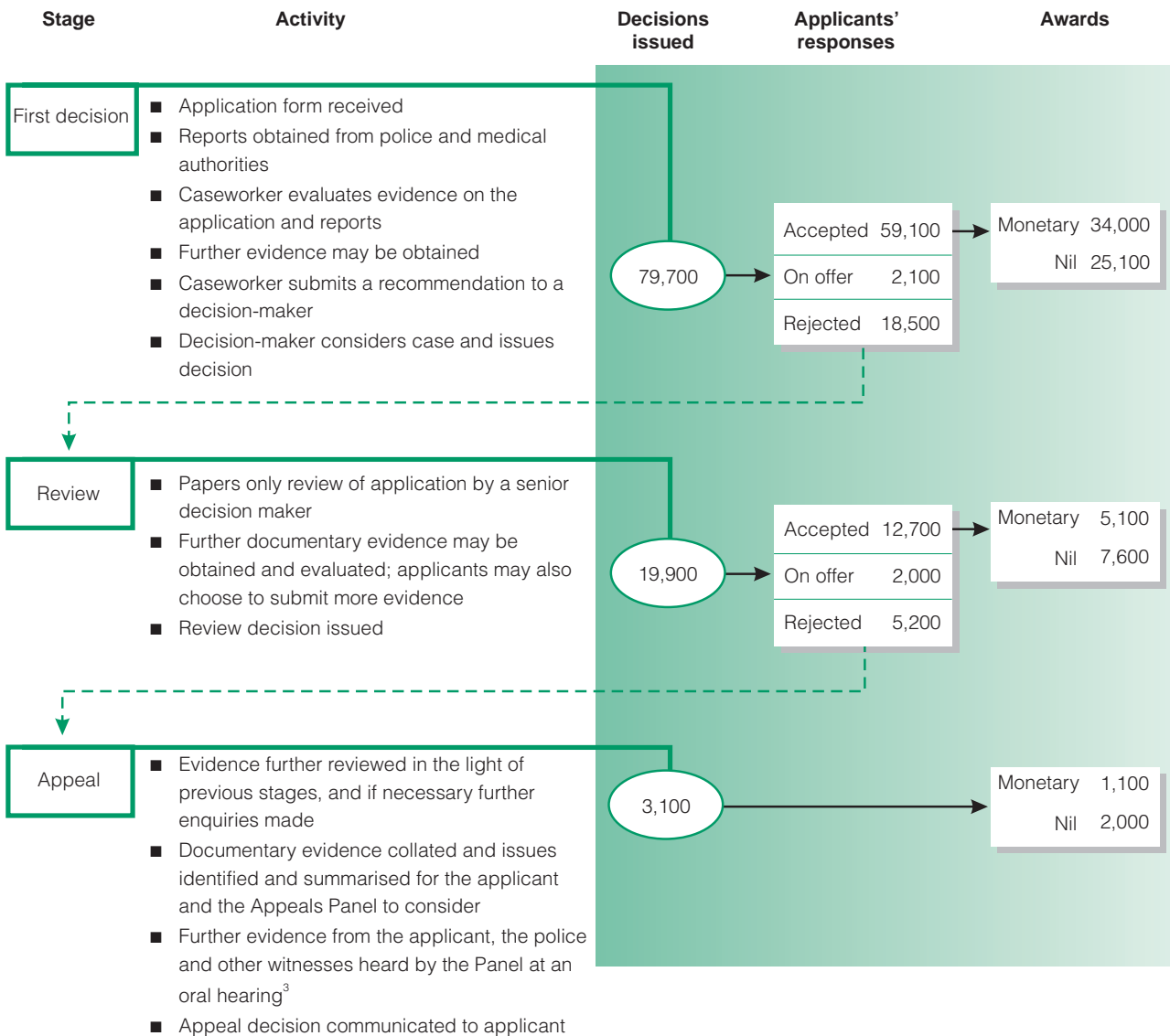
Applying for criminal injuries compensation

1.14 In deciding applications, the Authority's staff assess a range of evidence, including details supplied by the applicant on a standard form, and police and medical reports supplied, at the Authority's request, describing the incident and the injuries sustained. Under the tariff-based scheme, if the applicant is not content with the Authority's decision, an application may pass through two further stages: a review and an appeal (Figure 5). At each stage, the Authority or Appeals Panel may make, increase, decrease or withhold an award.

Figure 5

Applications may be resolved at one of three stages^{1,2}

Of the 75,000 applications for criminal injuries compensation resolved under the tariff-based scheme in 1998-99, around 59,000 (nearly four-fifths) were resolved at the first decision and did not require a review or an appeal; nearly 13,000 (17 per cent) were resolved at the review stage; and 3,000 (4 per cent) were resolved by the Appeals Panel.



Notes: 1. Figures are actual throughput during 1998-99. Differences from Figure 1 arise from the inclusion of cases on offer from first decision and review stages.
 2. An application is resolved, or finalised, when a decision made by the Authority whether, a monetary award or a nil award, is accepted by the applicant, or on an appeal decision by the Appeals Panel.
 3. In unmeritorious appeals, a decision to reject is made by an adjudicator without an oral hearing taking place.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of the Authority and Appeals Panel's management information and processes

1.15 Some applications are relatively straightforward and may be resolved within weeks. Others may take several years, for example, for an injury to stabilise sufficiently to be fairly assessed or to await the outcome of a trial. Cases 4 to 6 are examples of one straightforward and two complex applications respectively.

Cases 4 to 6

A petrol station worker was attacked by a customer who had been banned entry as a result of previous behaviour. The worker suffered serious neck injuries and submitted an application for compensation. A Level 4 award of £1,750 was made at first decision seven months later and was accepted.

The victim suffered facial injuries after being attacked by a gang of men outside a fast food outlet. An application submitted in late 1996 was turned down at first decision and review on the grounds that the victim, who had been drinking before the incident, had not co-operated sufficiently with the police. The Appeals Panel considered the case in April 1999 and, on the basis of oral evidence, decided to make an award of £1,600, since the Panel judged that the victim had not deliberately refused to make a complaint.

A mentally disabled victim suffered a severe indecent assault which caused physical injuries and psychological trauma. The application for compensation took nearly two years to resolve. New medical evidence, supplied by the victim's solicitor at appeal, caused the Panel to increase a Level 7 award of £3,000 to a Level 12 award of £7,500 for continuing psychological trauma; in addition to an award for physical injuries (10 per cent of £3,000).

Source: National Audit Office
review of a sample of
applications

Workload and applicants

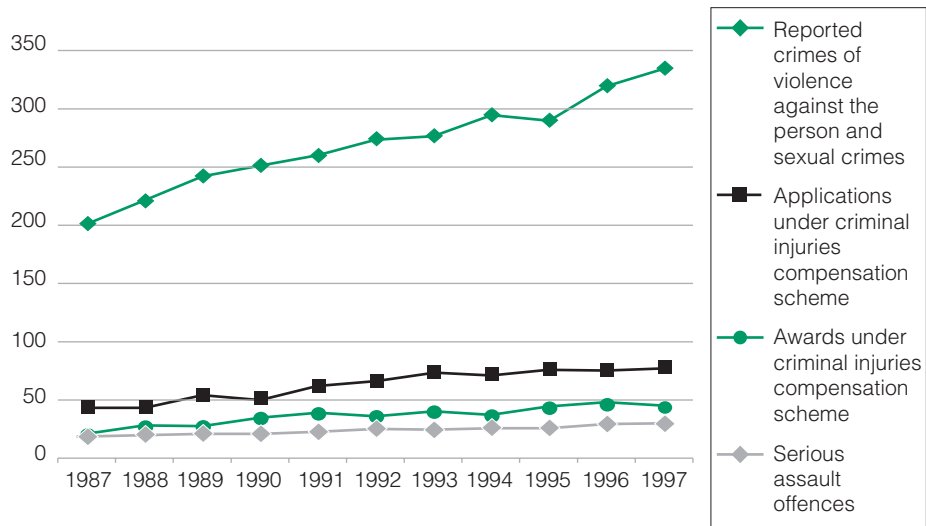
1.16 Since the scheme first started more than thirty years ago, the annual number of applications for compensation has increased 30 times to nearly 79,000 in 1998-99. The annual value of compensation paid has increased 40 times, in real terms, to around £195 million. During 1998-99, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority and the Appeals Panel resolved around 75,000 applications, including 13,000 at review and 3,000 at appeal. In the period in which we examined the Authority's operations, the pre-1996 criminal injuries compensation scheme and the new tariff-based scheme were operating in parallel. The Authority's performance in processing applications under the new scheme was therefore affected by the need to continue to clear cases under the earlier scheme.

1.17 Figure 6 shows the continuing trend in applications from 1987 against an increase in reported crimes of violence against the person and sexual offences. Our analysis demonstrates a strong statistical relationship between the levels of these crimes and the levels of applications under the scheme. It suggests that almost a quarter of reported violent crimes give rise to an application for compensation.

Trends in crimes of violence against the person and applications for criminal injuries compensation

Figure 6

In the ten years to 1997 the annual number of applications for criminal injuries compensation increased by 80 per cent to 77,000, whilst reported crimes of violence against the person increased by 50 per cent to over 310,000.



Sources: Home Office, *Criminal Statistics England and Wales 1997* (1998), page 33; Scottish Office; and Home Office, *Compensation for victims of violent crime* (1999), page 47

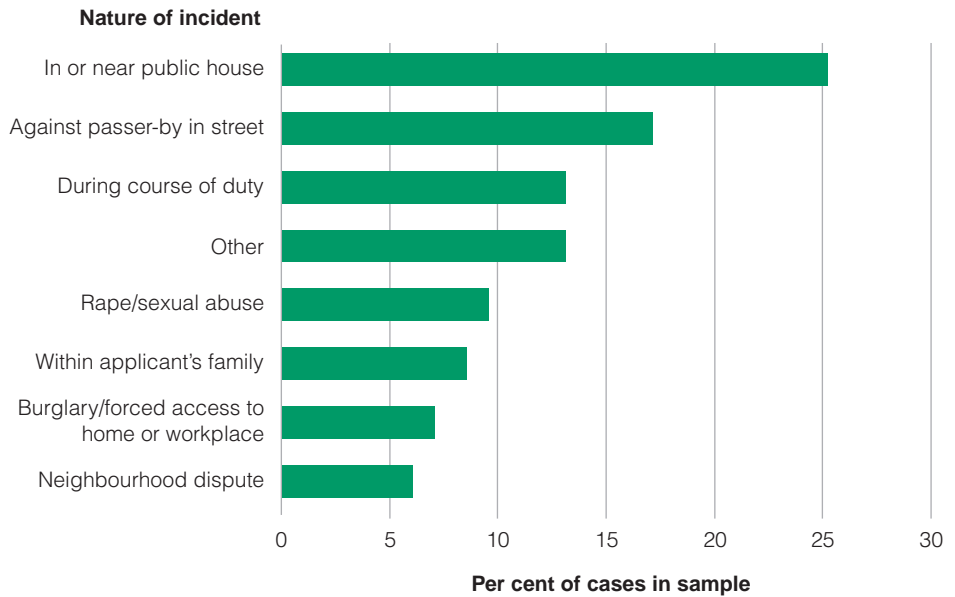
1.18 We examined a sample of 198 applications received in May 1998. Two-thirds of applicants in our sample were male. More than half of these applicants were aged between 20 and 39 years with an average age of just over 30. Our survey of more than 1,400 applicants produced a similar profile.

1.19 The nature of the incidents giving rise to applications is variable, but around a quarter of the applications in our sample related to incidents occurring in the vicinity of public houses and an eighth to injuries inflicted on public servants, for example police officers, during the course of duty (Figure 7).

Nature of incidents giving rise to applications for compensation

Figure 7

Around a quarter of the applications for criminal injuries compensation relate to incidents occurring in the vicinity of public houses.



Source: National Audit Office sample of 198 cases

Scope of the National Audit Office examination

1.20 This examination focuses on applications for compensation under the tariff-based compensation scheme established in 1996 and the role of the Authority and the Appeals Panel in dealing with them. In particular, we examined:

- whether communication with applicants is effective (Part 2);
- whether there are effective systems and procedures to assure the fairness and consistency of the decisions reached, and whether decisions accord with the scheme's statutory requirements (Part 3);
- how quickly applications for criminal injuries compensation are processed (Part 4); and
- whether applications are processed efficiently (Part 5).

Methodology

1.21 The main elements of our methodology (Appendix 1) were:

- benchmarking of the Authority's performance and processes against private sector insurance companies;
- questionnaire surveys of victims of crime (results at Appendix 2), the 51 police forces in England, Scotland and Wales (Appendix 3), and personal injury lawyers;
- consultation with third parties representing victims;
- review of samples of the Authority's and Appeals Panel's casework, and of the Authority's management information, performance indicators, and quality control;
- interviews with senior management and staff of the Authority and Appeals Panel; and
- focus group discussions with the Authority's staff.

Our fieldwork was conducted between March and October 1999.

Part 2: Communicating with applicants

2.1 People applying for criminal injuries compensation want to be treated with consideration and understanding. Communications with applicants, written and on the telephone, should be clear and easily understood, and handled with tact and sensitivity. In this part of the report, we examine:

- whether the scheme is easily understood by applicants;
- applicants' awareness of the scheme;
- whether the Authority keeps applicants informed about the progress of their application;
- how well decisions are explained to applicants;
- whether applicants are treated with consideration; and
- the Authority's and the Appeals Panel's plans to provide electronic services.

Whether the scheme is easily understood by applicants

2.2 Two main documents are used to promote the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme:

- *Victims of Crime*, an explanatory leaflet provided by the Home Office. This is distributed through, among others, police forces and victim support groups. It provides the address (but not the telephone number) of the Authority.
- *Victims of Violent Crime: A Guide to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme* produced by the Authority. It consists of 17 pages of information and guidance and 15 pages showing the awards that will be paid for different types of injury.

2.3 Of those respondents to our survey who had seen the Authority's guidance, 89 per cent considered it to be fairly or very helpful. However, only around half said that they had seen the guidance. A greater proportion of the applicants who had received an award had seen the guidance: 60 per cent compared with 40 per cent of applicants who did not receive an award. The Authority is not clear why so many applicants considered they had not seen the guidance since a copy goes to every applicant with the application form.

2.4 The minority of respondents who found the guidance unhelpful commented that it lacked clarity concerning eligibility criteria, especially for psychological injuries such as trauma. Some felt that it was vague about the evidence needed to support an application and did not indicate the extent to which awards could be reduced or refused on discretionary grounds (for example, if the applicant had a criminal record). Some respondents also commented that the guidance contained jargon.

2.5 Most respondents to our survey of personal injury lawyers considered that the Authority's guidance was helpful and, for them, reasonably clear. A minority considered that it was not written in sufficiently plain English, and was too complex and lengthy for many applicants to understand. Victim Support (an independent registered charity which offers help to victims of crime and receives financial support from the Government) considered the guidance to be very helpful and much improved compared with the guidance under the previous common law scheme. It suggested that applicants would benefit from having more information about the Authority's procedures and why it can take so long to process an application. It would also be helpful for applicants to know what evidence would assist with and hasten the resolution of their case.

2.6 About 80 per cent of the applicants who responded to our survey considered the application form to be easy to understand. However, 12 per cent found it difficult. Some respondents found completing the form stressful, since it brought back the trauma of the incident. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children considered that the application form should be redesigned to make it more user friendly, and that it was not well adapted for making applications in sexual abuse cases.

2.7 Neither the scheme's guidance nor the application form is provided in any language other than English. Four per cent of respondents to our survey considered that it would have been helpful to have them available in other languages. The Authority has plans to produce a new short guide to the scheme in

the same range of languages as the *Victims of Crime* leaflet (paragraph 2.2), which is available in 12 languages in addition to English, plus braille, large print and audio tape.

2.8 Despite the generally positive views on the Authority's guidance and application form, many applicants (almost two-thirds) felt it necessary to seek information and assistance, chiefly from solicitors and voluntary services such as Victim Support. (Those applicants that sought assistance from Victim Support may have received information on the scheme alongside a range of other free services available to crime victims from Victim Support.) The main reasons given by respondents for seeking assistance were:

- lack of knowledge about the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme;
- not being sure about the scheme's eligibility criteria;
- needing help to complete the form correctly; and
- a general need for support, not specifically related to the scheme, in the period following the incident in which they were injured.

2.9 During the month in which we drew the sample for our survey, there was little difference between the success rates of applicants who were represented and those who were not. The success rate was slightly lower for represented applicants, at 47 per cent, compared with 52 per cent of applicants with no representation. Applicants who were represented were twice as likely to request an appeal against earlier decisions: 6 per cent compared to 3 per cent for those who were unrepresented. Success rates at appeal were 50 per cent and 45 per cent for represented and unrepresented applicants respectively. The Appeals Panel monitors the success rates for appeals, and found that, for the year 1998-99 as a whole, the difference between the success rates of represented and unrepresented applicants was less than 2 per cent.

Applicants' awareness of the scheme

2.10 Under the Citizen's Charter for Victims of Crime, the police should provide to victims a copy of the *Victims of Crime* leaflet which provides details of, among other things, both the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme and the services of Victim Support. Figure 8 shows when and how applicants who responded to our survey became aware of the scheme. Nearly 60 per cent had become aware of the

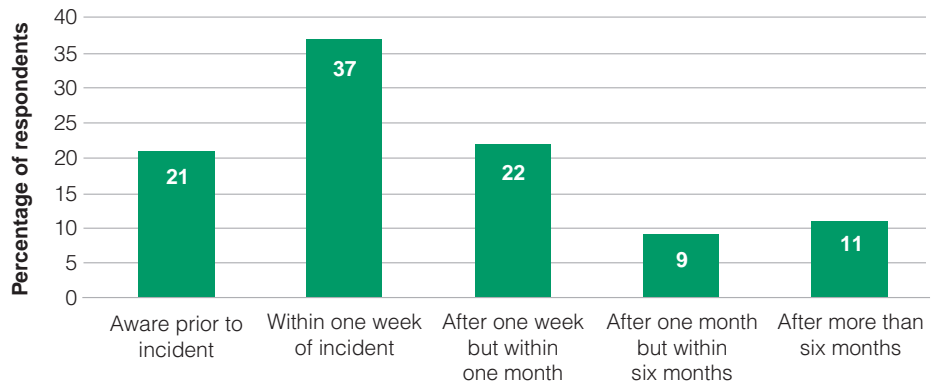
scheme within one week of the incident, or were already aware of the scheme. However, more than one in ten did not learn of the scheme until six months or more after the incident. A majority had learned of the scheme through the police and Victim Support.

Applicants' awareness of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

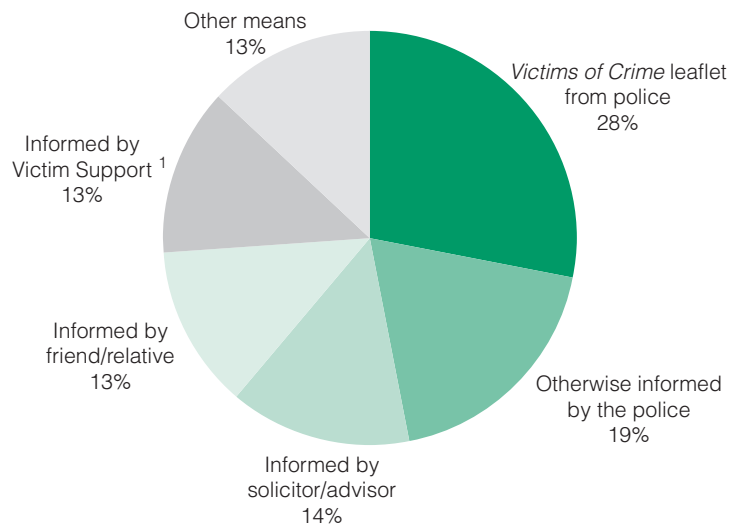
Figure 8

Most applicants were aware of the scheme within one week after the incident in which their injury was sustained. The main source of information about the scheme is the police.

(a) When applicants become aware of the scheme



(b) How applicants become aware of the scheme



Source: National Audit Office survey of 1,407 applicants

Note: 1. Victim Support is an independent registered charity which offers help to victims of crime and receives financial support from Government.

2.11 It is difficult to determine whether all those eligible for criminal injuries compensation are made aware of the scheme. We researched this issue through our survey of personal injury lawyers and in discussions with organisations that deal with victims. Victim Support considered that the scheme is fairly well publicised. However, other organisations felt that publicity could be better and that some victims are aware too late and time barred from applying for compensation. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children considered that many families were not aware of the scheme, and that often literature designed to help victims did not refer to it, for example *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (Department of Health, 1999). They suggested that there should be greater co-ordination between public bodies in the strategy to reach potential applicants.

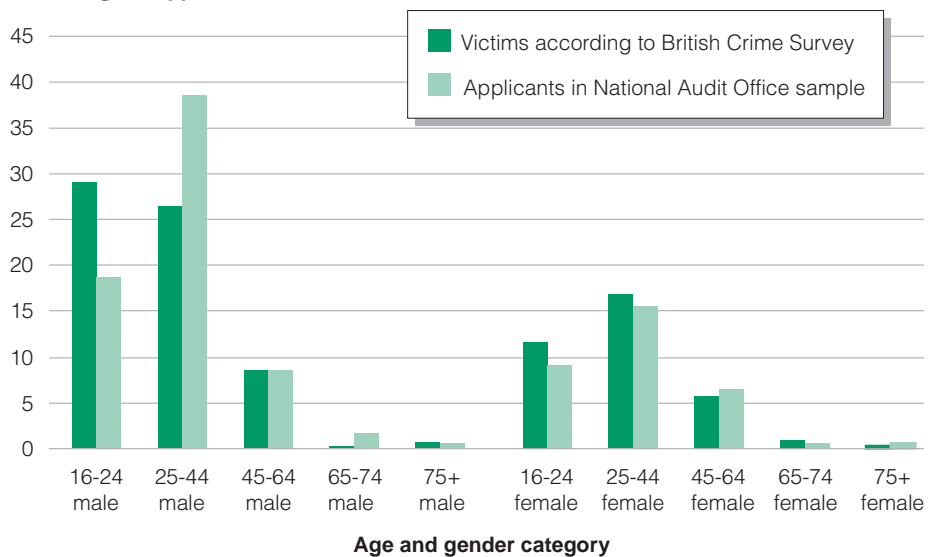
2.12 On average, in 1998-99, for every 100 recorded crimes of violence, just under 23 applications for compensation were made. Most minor injuries caused by crimes of violence will be below the minimum threshold for compensation. Our comparison of the age and gender composition of applicants in our sample with crime victims' data published in the 1998 British Crime Survey suggests a relationship between levels of applications by age and gender and those of victims of crime (Figure 9).

Comparison of the age and gender composition for adult victims of crimes of violence and applicants for criminal injuries compensation

Figure 9

We found a significant relationship between the age and gender of sample applicants for criminal injuries compensation and those of victims of crime, although rates of applications among young adult male victims are below what might be expected.

Percentage of applicants and victims



Source: National Audit Office sample analysis and data from the 1998 British Crime Survey (Home Office Statistical Bulletin 21/98), Table 5.6 and Monthly Digest of Statistics: December 1998 (Office for National Statistics), Table 2.2

Note: The unequal age intervals correspond to the way data are presented in the British Crime Survey

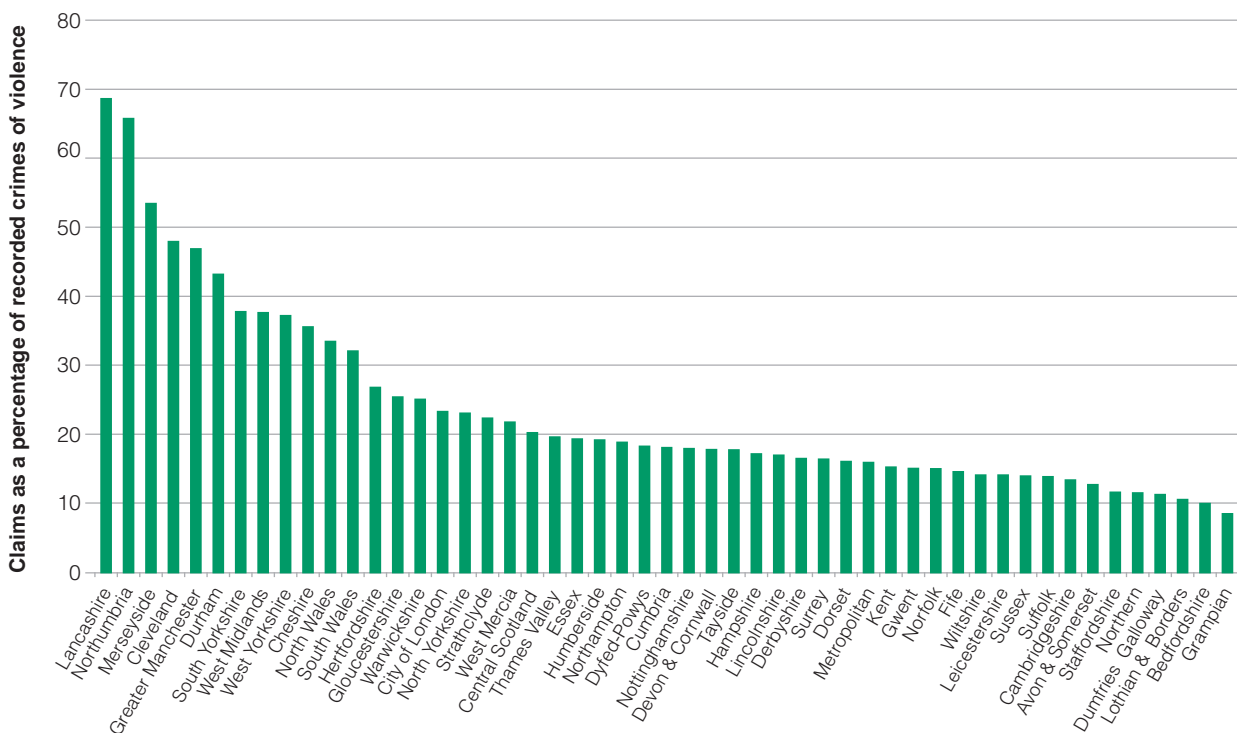
2.13 The Authority does not monitor the ethnicity of applicants, and we were unable to undertake any analysis ourselves because applicants are not asked to name their ethnic group when they apply.

2.14 We found wide variations in the rate of applications between different parts of Britain (Figure 10). For example, in Lancashire, there were 70 applications for compensation for every 100 reported violent crimes, whereas in Bedfordshire and Grampian there were fewer than 10.

Figure 10

Applications in 1998-99 compared with violent crime reported in 1997-98

There is wide variation in the ratio of applications to reported violent crimes across police force areas in England, Scotland and Wales.



Source: National Audit Office analysis of Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority data on applications; Home Office Criminal Statistics: England and Wales 1997 (Cm 4162: 1998), Table 2.5, p.36. ('Violence against the person' & Sexual offences'); and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary: Annual Report 1997-98 (The Stationery Office: 1998), Table, 9 and 10, pp 72-73 ('Serious assault', 'Petty assault', and 'Sexual assault')

2.15 Figure 11 shows how applications are concentrated in one part of the country: more than 36 per cent came from an area of England stretching from the West Midlands and Merseyside and Lancashire in the west to Northumbria in the east, which has 18 per cent of total recorded crimes of violence. We examined whether this could be explained by a greater number of invalid applications being made in this region. However we found that rates of disallowance of applications not within the eligibility criteria for the scheme were broadly similar across the country, with no statistically significant relationship between disallowance rates and the proportions of applications to violent crime.

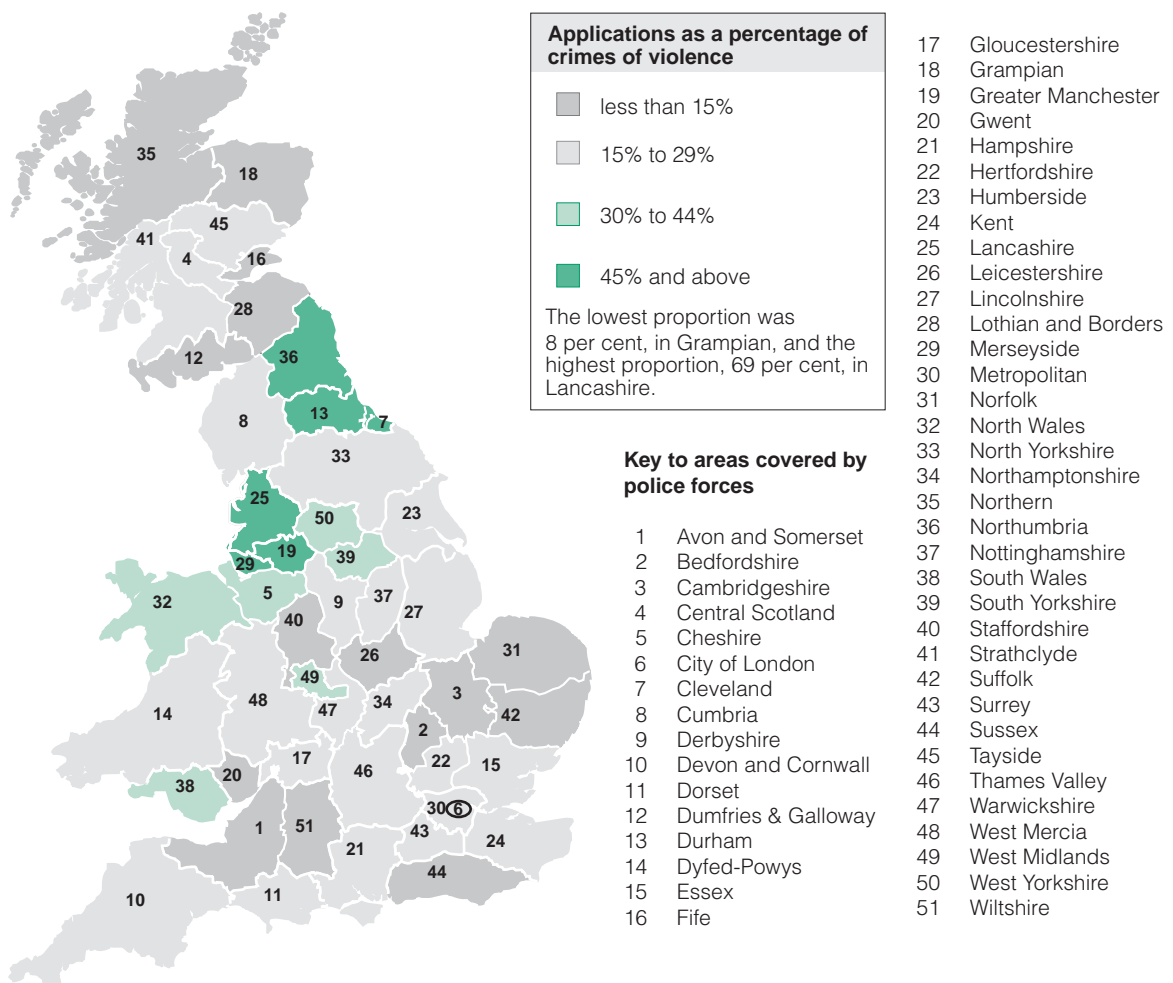
2.16 These geographical variations may be explained in a number of ways. Firstly there may be an actual difference in awareness of the scheme in different parts of the country, possibly because of variations in the spread or the effectiveness of Victim Support, the police and other local agencies in promoting the scheme. Equally, the variations might relate to the nature of violent crime in different areas: for example, the high claiming areas may have a greater proportion of the crimes likely to result in an application. A third possible explanation for the variations is the reliability of the crime statistics themselves caused by inconsistencies in recording practices among police forces, or there may be regional variations in levels of violent crimes which are reported by the public and recorded by the police. To explore the reasons for these variations, the Authority should:

- obtain information on how applicants became aware of the compensation scheme, possibly by asking an appropriate question on the application form or when receiving telephone requests, or by coding the application forms distributed to agencies such as Victim Support;
- liaise with Victim Support to compare regional data for applications for criminal injuries compensation with data on referrals to Victim Support following crimes of violence, rape and sexual crimes; and
- liaise with the Crime and Criminal Justice Unit of the Home Office's Research, Development and Statistics Directorate to establish whether the variation in application rates can be explained by regional variations in levels of reporting and recording violent crime; the relative severity of crimes of violence and patterns; and/or the effect of repeat victimisation.

Figure 11 Applications for criminal injuries compensation by region

28,488 applications (36 per cent) were generated by 22 per cent of the population living in an area recording 18 per cent of crimes of violence in Great Britain

Police force area	Applications received	Population ('000s)	Population (per cent of Great Britain population)	Crimes of violence	Crimes of violence (per cent of national total)	Applications (per cent of crimes of violence, as map)
Lancashire	3,225	1,425	2.5	4,605	1.4	69
Northumbria	3,443	1,430	2.5	5,243	1.5	66
Merseyside	4,794	1,413	2.5	8,989	2.6	53
Greater Manchester	7,251	2,572	4.5	15,506	4.5	47
West Midlands	4,167	2,630	4.6	11,096	3.2	38
South Yorkshire	1,963	1,305	2.3	5,209	1.5	38
West Yorkshire	3,645	2,110	3.7	9,820	2.9	37
Total	28,488	12,885	22.6	60,468	17.6	47



Source: National Audit Office sample analysis and data from the 1998 British Crime Survey (Home Office Statistical Bulletin 21/98), Table 5.6 and Monthly Digest of Statistics: December 1998 (Office for National Statistics), Table 2.2

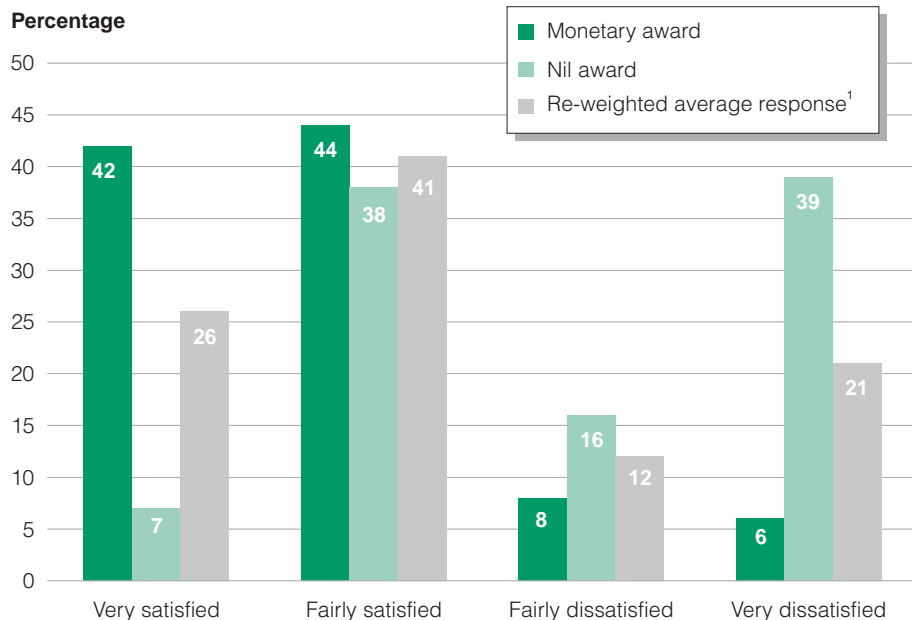
Keeping applicants informed about their case

2.17 Almost one third of the applicants who responded to our survey contacted the Authority at some point during the course of their application. They rated the service provided by the Authority in dealing with their enquiries favourably. A minority were unsatisfied though this was more substantial among applicants who received no award (Figure 12). Members of the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers who responded to our survey and Victim Support also rated the responses of the Authority’s staff to enquiries favourably, particularly the response to telephone enquiries. However, ten out of the 15 legal firms felt that that the Authority was poor at taking the initiative to keep applicants informed about the progress of their cases, and Victim Support considered that more information on progress should be provided.

Applicants’ views about the way the Authority dealt with their enquiries

Figure 12

Overall, there were high levels of satisfaction with the service provided by the Authority in dealing with enquiries from applicants. A significant minority was very dissatisfied, primarily among those not granted an award.



Source: National Audit Office survey of applicants

Note: 1. These results include adjustments to take account of response bias (Appendix 2, paragraph 4).

2.18 Our review of case files found little evidence of communication with applicants and their representatives during the course of applications even where delays occurred, for example, in the provision of medical or police reports. And applicants are not given much idea of the expected decision date. Where the Authority wrote in response to queries, we noted that the correspondence was

brief, and usually in a standard letter format. The Authority has been looking at how it can improve communications with applicants and at the resource implications of any changes.

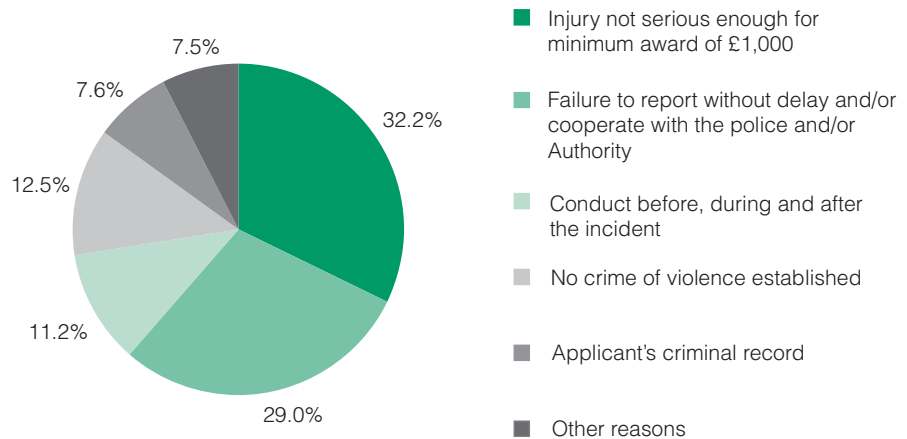
Explaining decisions

2.19 In 1998-99, slightly more than half of the first decisions were “nil awards”, rejecting the application for compensation. Applications are unsuccessful for a variety of reasons (Figure 13). In a third of the applications rejected by the Authority in 1998-99, the reason for rejection was that the injury was insufficiently serious to qualify for the minimum tariff award of £1,000. In almost 30 per cent of cases turned down, the reason for refusal was the applicant’s failure to report the crime to the police without delay or to co-operate with the police and/or the Authority. In most of the remaining cases, the Authority disallowed the application on the grounds that the injury had not resulted from a crime of violence, or because of the applicant’s criminal record or conduct in relation to the incident.

Reasons for refusals of applications for criminal injuries compensation, 1998-99

Figure 13

A third of refused applications were turned down because the injury was not deemed sufficiently serious to merit the minimum award of £1,000. In almost 30 per cent of cases turned down, the reason for refusal was that the applicant had failed to report the crime without delay or had not co-operated with the police and/or the Authority.



Source: Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority

2.20 A far higher proportion of nil awards than of awards involving an offer of compensation was not accepted by applicants and went on to the review stage (77 per cent of all reviews were of nil awards). Similarly, a far higher proportion of nil awards confirmed at review was not accepted and went on to appeal (90 per cent of all appeals were of nil awards confirmed at review). Though more often contested, nil awards were less likely to succeed at review or appeal than cases where the applicant was contesting the level of compensation offered (Figure 1).

2.21 It is important that reasons for decisions are explained consistently to applicants. For consistency and efficiency, decisions are usually explained using standard paragraphs, which include the provisions of the scheme relied on for the decision and do not generally relate these to the details of the specific case. Almost identical letters are often used at the first decision stage and at review when a first decision is upheld; and, where the decision is changed following a review, applicants are frequently not provided with a reason for the change. In both circumstances, the applicant may gain the mistaken impression that the review was not a meaningful process.

2.22 Figure 14 shows an example where the first decision letter and the review letter were almost identical, and neither conveyed the reasons for the decision in terms which would have been meaningful to the applicant. It also shows the anonymised appeal decision letter in the same case, which provided the applicant with a better explanation of the treatment of the case which, if it had been provided earlier, might have dissuaded the applicant from pursuing the case beyond the first decision.

Figure 14

Extracts from letters to an applicant conveying the decisions of the Authority and the Appeals Panel

Letters from the Authority explain the legal reason for arriving at a particular decision, but fail to explain how the specific circumstances surrounding the application led to the decision.

The Authority's first decision

Dear Sir

Having considered your application for compensation I regret to inform you that no award can be made for the following reason(s):

Under paragraph 24 of the Scheme, the Authority can only make an award of compensation for injuries which justify at least level 1 award.

In this case, the information before the Authority shows that your injuries were minor and do not attract an award at level 1 of the Tariff of Injuries. I regret that an award cannot be made in these circumstances.

The Authority's review decision

Dear Sir

Having considered carefully the reasons given in the request for a review of this application under paragraph 59 of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme 1996, I regret to inform you that no award can be made for the following reason(s):

Under paragraph 24 of the Scheme, the Authority can only make an award of compensation for injuries which justify at least level 1 award.

In this case, the information before the Authority shows that your injuries were minor and do not attract an award at level 1 of the Tariff of Injuries. I regret that an award cannot be made in these circumstances.

The Appeals Panel's decision¹

Dear Sir

Your appeal against the decision reached on review by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority has been referred to and considered by me in accordance with paragraphs 70 and 71 of the Scheme. I regret to tell you that I have dismissed the appeal for the following reasons.

You sustained injuries when assaulted on [date] at approximately [time] when walking along [location of assault]. The medical evidence is that you received a black eye. Fortunately there was no fracture and no treatment was necessary save for an ice pack in casualty. There was no scarring. The immediate effects of the assault lasted two weeks and you were off work for one week.

Paragraphs 24 and 25 of the Scheme only permit an award of compensation to be made to an applicant who has been the victim of a crime of violence if an injury is sustained which is sufficiently serious to qualify for an award which is equal to at least the minimum amount payable under the Scheme, which is currently £1,000. This means that an award under £1,000 cannot be made, and in cases of any less serious injury the applicant is not compensated by the Scheme.

Note: 1. Letters are normally only provided by the Appeals Panel in unmeritorious appeals where the decision to reject an appeal is made by a single adjudicator without an oral hearing taking place. In other cases, the decision is conveyed at the hearing.

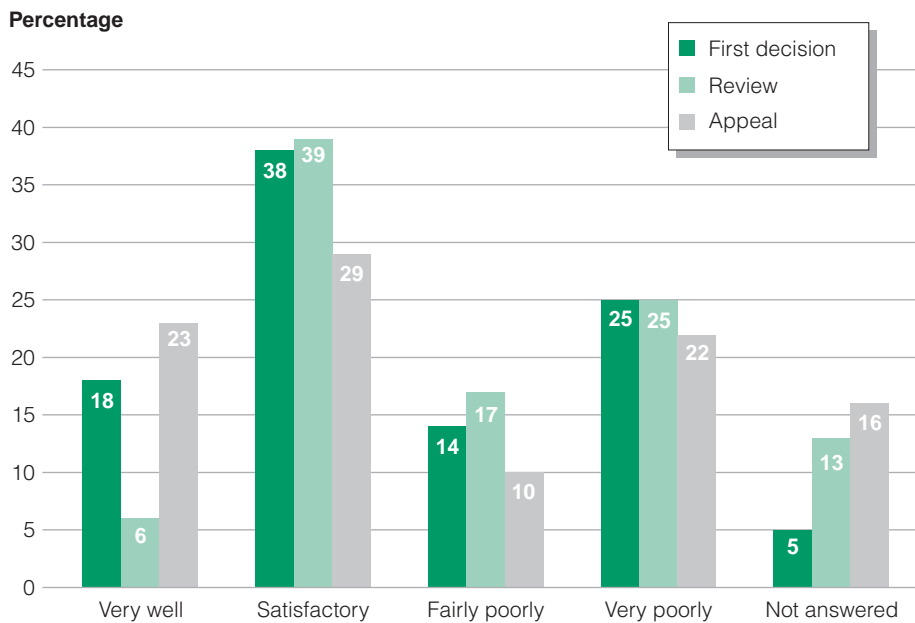
Source: Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority and the Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel

2.23 Responses to our survey indicated that almost 60 per cent of applicants considered that the Authority explained the reasons for its first decisions either very well or satisfactorily; almost 40 per cent of applicants, however, considered the reasons given for decisions to be explained fairly poorly or very poorly. More than 40 per cent of those applicants whose case was subject to review considered the Authority explained the reasons given for the decision to be fairly poor or very poor. Among applicants whose cases were considered by the Appeals Panel, just over half of applicants were satisfied with the reasons they were given, but one third thought that the decision had been explained fairly or very poorly (Figure 15). The Appeals Panel’s own separate surveys have indicated higher levels of satisfaction of around 80 per cent of respondents.

Applicants’ views about how well the Authority and the Appeals Panel explained the reasons for decisions

Figure 15

Though many applicants considered that the Authority and the Appeals Panel explained reasons for decisions well, a substantial minority was not satisfied.



Source: National Audit Office survey of applicants

2.24 Ten out of the 15 legal firms, which responded to our Association of Personal Injury Lawyers’ survey, considered that the Authority did not explain the reasons for decisions well in its correspondence with applicants.

Treating applicants with consideration

2.25 The organisations we consulted perceived the Authority's staff to have values that reflect their role, showing kindness and consideration to applicants. Where applicants did feel poorly treated, this generally arose from the systems and procedures rather than the conduct of staff.

2.26 There were some concerns about the oral appeal hearings, which both Victim Support and the Royal College of Nursing considered could cause stress by the applicant having to re-live the experience. In some cases, the victim may have to come face to face with the offender, because the offender may be invited to the hearing where facts are in dispute and the Appeals Panel's decision would otherwise be vulnerable to challenge by judicial review. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children also told us of a case of a female victim of sexual abuse who had had to face an all male appeals panel, which she found very traumatic. Although the Appeals Panel has received no complaints of this kind, it now has a policy of hearing sexual abuse cases at special hearings which include a doctor and a woman member on the panel.

2.27 During 1998-99, the Authority received 85 complaints from applicants or their representatives. Complaints to the Authority chiefly concerned delays in case resolution and policy issues; one in ten related to the attitude of staff. During focus group discussions, the Authority's staff were concerned that the challenge of processing cases quickly left them with less time than they would wish for customer care.

2.28 The Appeals Panel received 24 complaints in 1998-99, which mainly concerned the reasonableness of decisions. A small number related to the attitude of Panel members, and were investigated by the Panel Secretary who concluded that there was no basis for complaint. The Council of Tribunals, which oversees the Panel, attends several Panel hearings each year to observe and advise on the Panel's proceedings. The Council does not provide assessments or reports after attending a tribunal hearing, but the Tribunal Chairman would be approached informally if there were concerns. The Chairman of the Appeals Panel has received no informal approaches.

2.29 The Appeals Panel held a customer care seminar in April 1998 (London) and in February 1999 (Glasgow). Participants providing views at the seminar included victim support groups, victims' representatives and charities such as the

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. The Appeals Panel has held trial customer satisfaction surveys between July and August 1999. The survey results indicated broad satisfaction with the Panel's performance.

Plans to provide electronic services

2.30 The Government has set a target that by 2002 a quarter of dealings between citizens and Government should be capable of being done electronically through telephone, TV or computer. The proportion is planned to increase to 100 per cent by 2005. The aims of this policy are to:

- make key information available 24 hours a day;
- increase the efficient use of public sector resources; and
- improve the co-ordination of service provision across the public sector.

2.31 One way of delivering electronic services is by public sector bodies developing internet websites. The websites can be used to provide information to the public, as a vehicle for transactions and to improve communication with other public bodies. In our survey of applicants, two-fifths of respondents told us that they would have used the internet to make their application for compensation if this service had been available.

2.32 The Authority does not currently have a website, though it plans to develop one. The Appeals Panel has established a website, at www.cicap.gov.uk. The Panel's website provides information about the criminal injuries compensation scheme and its administration, the Appeals Panel and the appeals procedure, and the proposed dates and locations of future hearings, as well as links to other relevant sites of other government agencies and victims' groups. The site will shortly include the Panel's revised guidance document translated into Welsh, the main languages of the Indian sub-continent, Mandarin, and any other languages determined by demand.

2.33 Through appropriate use of website technology the Authority could:

- provide information and guidance to the public 24 hours a day, and the facility to comment on the Authority's services;

- improve communications with the police and medical agencies, the Appeals Panel and the Authority's London and Glasgow offices;
- deal with transactions such as applications electronically; and
- subject to appropriate security safeguards, allow applicants access to information on the progress of their applications.

2.34 The complexity of the technology needed to create the website would depend on its intended uses. For example, 24-hour provision of information and guidance would require only the most straightforward technology, whereas any use involving exchange of confidential information, such as medical reports or electronic payments, would require high security for the transfer of data.

2.35 We recently examined the use of website technology across the public sector in our report *Government on the Web*. Key principles for the development of an active website arising from that examination are shown in Figure 16. These would all be relevant to the development of a website on the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme. We would draw particular attention to the need to involve non-government organisations in the use of a website, which would be essential to ensure that people without personal access to a computer or the ability to use the technology can nevertheless use the service themselves via an intermediary.

Key principles for the development of an active website

Figure 16

Key principles include:

Links to other government websites to facilitate "joined-up government".

Links to other relevant non-governmental organisations. For example, in the case of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme, such organisations might include Victim Support, the National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC).

Prioritising site information to fit users' needs and current government policies.

The inclusion of enhanced directory services, to enable citizens to find an appropriate phone, fax, and e-mail contact for specific enquiries.

Provision of a direct e-mail route to leave comments about the site itself, with frequent reviews of and responses to these comments by the website manager.

Source: Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, *Government on the Web*, HC87, Session 1999-2000
www.open.gov.uk/nao/home.htm

Recommendations

1. The Authority should review its guidance and application forms, taking account of the comments of respondents to our survey, and should provide them in languages other than English for applicants whose first language is not English.
2. The Authority should monitor the characteristics of applicants, including ethnicity, to establish whether there are differences in application rates between different ethnic groups which need to be addressed by better targeting of some groups to improve awareness of the scheme.
3. We established that there are wide geographical variations in application rates to the incidence of violent crime. The Authority should explore these further by:
 - obtaining information on how applicants became aware of the scheme;
 - liaising with Victim Support to compare regional data for applications for criminal injuries compensation with data on referrals to Victim Support following violent crimes; and
 - liaising with the Home Office's Research, Development and Statistics Directorate to establish whether appropriate variations in application rates may actually be explained by variations in crime type and crime recording practices.
4. The Authority should improve its communications with applicants while their cases are being processed, for example by:
 - providing an indicative timetable for the processing of their case; and
 - where delays occur, advising applicants of the reasons for delay.
5. The Authority should review the quality of its written communications, particularly in relation to decisions, to ensure that full and meaningful explanations are provided. Its review should consider the resources needed to improve its communications, including training of the Authority's staff.

- 6.** The Authority and Appeals Panel should build on initiatives already planned and underway for further improving consultation with victim support agencies and applicants' representatives. They should take action to address any areas of concern in their customer care.
- 7.** The Authority should survey applicants on a regular basis, liaising with the Appeals Panel regarding its surveys, so that they are jointly aware of any concerns and take action to address them.
- 8.** The Authority should take forward its plans for developing a website, drawing on the experience of the Appeal's Panel and following the good practice principles that have emerged from experience in the wider public and private sectors.
- 9.** The Home Office should consider commissioning research to review the effectiveness of the channels through which the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme is promoted.

Part 3: Deciding an application

3.1 In this part of the report we examine how the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority ensures that decisions are fair, consistent and accord with its statutory responsibilities. We consider:

- the experience and training of the Authority's staff; and
- whether the Authority has the systems in place to provide assurance that decisions are made fairly, consistently and that awards are paid only in respect of eligible applicants.

Experience and training of the Authority's staff

Recruitment of staff to the Authority

3.2 Because it has no independent legal status, the Authority is unable to employ staff directly. Instead, it takes staff on loan from the Home Office for its London office and the Scottish Executive for its office in Glasgow. Staff are expected to stay with the Authority for between one and three years, although they may stay longer. In 1998-99, on average, 55 per cent of staff had been working for the Authority or its predecessor for over three years.

3.3 There have, on occasions, been significant delays in filling vacancies because suitable applicants may not be immediately available. For example, between April and June 1999 there were 15 vacant posts out of a complement of 164 in the London office, and 38 out of a complement of 337 in the Glasgow office, and 30 casuals were being employed to reduce the shortfall. Staff considered that the Authority found it difficult to attract staff since it has a weak profile, particularly within the Home Office, and a move to the Authority is not seen as furthering career progression.

3.4 Relying entirely upon loaned staff considerably reduces the Authority's ability to employ the kind of people most suited to its work, and to retain them for longer periods to help build experience and develop their careers within the Authority. Greater flexibility, for example by permitting direct recruitment, would increase the Authority's scope to market itself to people who might wish to work there, and to match skills and experience to available posts. The Home Office has

recently begun to work with the Authority to address these issues, and an external recruitment exercise for junior staff and an internal promotion board for the Authority and the Appeal's Panel are in hand.

Training and development

3.5 The job performed by the Authority's caseworkers and decision-makers is demanding, requiring a breadth of skills to evaluate medical and police evidence and deal sensitively with applicants. Skills are built up through experience of working on cases, mentoring and specific training programmes. The Authority has developed a strategy and action plan for training and development. The strategy identifies three objectives:

- **improving skills and knowledge**, including the specialist knowledge needed to interpret the scheme's regulations and calculate the value of an award;
- **improving performance**, encompassing general areas such as personal effectiveness and computer literacy; and
- **improving management techniques**, covering leadership and management.

3.6 To support these objectives, the Authority funds in-house and externally provided training, further education and an open-learning centre containing materials such as interactive computer programmes. The training and development plan provides for 14 days of induction training soon after caseworkers join the Authority and three days of induction training for clerical staff. Caseworkers receive three weeks of further training following their initial three months in post, covering technical skills, the Authority's processes and customer care.

3.7 Staff working for the Appeals Panel also attend induction courses, covering procedures and customer care. All Panel Members attend annual practical training seminars. In addition, there has been a one-day seminar for new Legal Members who chair panels, and two one-day seminars for non-legal members selected to take the chair in the presence of a legally qualified member. Following the sessions, the Appeals Panel Chairman sits in on two sessions being chaired by the newly trained members to help ensure consistency in procedure and decision-making at hearings.

3.8 The Authority's programmes demonstrate a commitment to appropriate training of its staff. This was borne out by our discussions with staff, although they suggested areas for improvement.

- There can be long delays in providing specialist training to staff who join the Authority soon after courses have been held. This results in the caseworkers carrying out work without adequate preparation and places particular pressure on their colleagues and line managers during this period.
- There was sometimes a poor match between training undertaken and what was then expected of staff, for example involving more complex cases than those dealt with on courses.
- There is scope for further training on customer care and communications, in particular on how to deal with distraught or angry applicants.
- The quality of the training would be improved if the trainers rotated with caseworkers to keep their own skills up to date.
- Staff commented that the personal development plans did not always work as intended, for example not all line managers played their full part in the process.

3.9 In December 1999, the Authority achieved accreditation under Investors in People, having demonstrated to the satisfaction of the accreditation assessor the links between its organisational objectives and the training and development of its staff.

Guidance to staff

3.10 A guidance manual for staff provides detailed instructions on dealing with applications, covering: eligibility criteria; application, submission and decision procedures; applications made on behalf of children; and applications relating to a fatality. The manual also helps staff by providing standard letters, proformas and formulae for making calculations. It is updated regularly, but does not yet include a section on quality assurance procedures. In addition, the Appeals Panel produces a guidance manual on the hearings procedure and a bi-annual newsletter, which includes information on case interpretation.

3.11 The Authority’s staff felt that there was scope to make the manual more accessible and user-friendly. For example, it has no index and staff can have difficulty locating the information they need. Versions of the manual are also sometimes unreliable, because updates depend on staff inserting them into the loose-leaf manual, and because procedures introduced in draft may take several years to finalise, which affects the clarity of the manual. The Authority has set work in hand to revise and computerise the manual.

Quality management

Use of discretion in decision making

3.12 Although the award of compensation is subject to specific criteria, caseworkers need to exercise judgement in determining whether an award should be paid in full, reduced or refused. Figure 2 in Part 1 on page 9 sets out the four areas relating to an applicant’s conduct and record in which discretion to reduce or refuse an award may be applied. Our analysis of a sample of 79 first decisions in which decisions had been made and communicated to the applicant found that the Authority had used discretion in one of these areas to reduce or refuse 17 awards (Figure 17).

Use of discretion relating to an applicant’s conduct or record, resulting in a refusal or a reduced award at first decision

Figure 17

Discretion relating to an applicant’s conduct or record was applied to refuse or reduce an award in one fifth of cases, primarily because of the Authority’s assessment of the applicant’s own conduct.

Area in which discretion was used	Number of cases
Assessment of conduct which led to the injury	10
Co-operation with the police and/or the Authority	4
Applicant’s record of convictions	2
Delay in reporting incident to the police	1

Source: National Audit Office analysis of first decision cases

Measures to maximise consistency in decisions

3.13 As set out in Figure 5 in Part 1 on page 14, there are three stages in the processing of cases under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme at which a recommendation or decision on an application can be tested:

- review of the caseworker's recommendation at the first decision stage by the member of staff responsible for deciding the case – the decision maker;
- review of the case by a more senior decision-maker where the applicant contests the decision; and
- further review by the independent Appeals Panel if further contested by the applicant.

The second and third stages apply only where the applicant contests the decision.

3.14 The Authority has a Security and Quality Unit comprising two staff who undertake routine checks to ensure that applications are processed in accordance with the Authority's procedures. The Unit's work is standardised insofar as its reviews of case samples follow an 18-point checklist, but the Unit does not work to targets for the number of cases to be examined or to specific standards about what constitutes an acceptable level of error. The Unit's work does not extend to the timeliness of cases and whether more could have been done to hasten a decision, and it does not review decisions subsequently changed at review or appeal. Following the discovery of internal frauds in 1998, the Unit was given an expanded security remit, and much of its work now focuses on the control of fraud.

3.15 Prior to July 1999, the Authority did not undertake any regular, systematic review of the quality of its decisions, except through the work of its Security and Quality Unit. In July 1999, it initiated a pilot exercise to review the decisions in 111 cases that had gone to review in April 1999. In 17 cases (15 per cent), the quality of casework and/or decisions at first decision, review or both, was judged not to meet the Authority's standards. In three cases, clearly erroneous decisions had been made at first decision and had been corrected later at review. The Authority subsequently ran staff meetings to discuss lessons from the pilot. It judged the exercise to have been useful, but that it had taken up significant senior and experienced staff resources, which are already fully stretched in trying to meet targets for review decisions.

3.16 In February 2000, the Authority completed a second exercise, focusing on cases turned down at first decision using the areas of discretion described in Figure 17, where the decisions were subsequently reversed at review or appeal. The exercise also included applications seeking compensation for sexual assault or abuse that had been refused, and the decision had then been reversed at review or appeal. As with the first exercise, the aim was to consider the quality of decision making and to identify any lessons from the later stages of the process.

3.17 There is currently no system for clearly documenting the reasons for changes in awards at review or appeal and feeding them back to the original decision-maker or caseworker. Consequently, caseworkers and decision-makers are unable to learn from the experience on these cases and are therefore unlikely to correct their practice if shortcomings in their decision led to the change. Authority staff particularly perceived that awards were sometimes amended at appeal without clear reasons. If applications are to be processed consistently and unnecessary reviews and appeals avoided, staff need to be kept fully up to date on precedent and to understand why their decisions have been changed. This is a prerequisite for creating a culture of getting decisions “right first time”.

3.18 The Appeals Panel gave us examples of differences in interpretation that it had detected in the course of its consideration of cases and the action it had taken to help improve consistency. Two examples in 1998 were the treatment of police officers’ and firefighters’ applications for accidental injury caused by taking exceptional risk, and the interpretation of spent convictions. In the first, the Panel ran a seminar attended by the Authority’s Chief Executive and Senior Presenting Officer, to discuss and help clarify the issues, and in the second, the Panel’s Chairman produced guidance, which was shared with the Authority. Issues of interpretation are also periodically discussed at senior-level meetings between the Panel and the Authority.

3.19 Victim support groups and victims’ representatives perceived the Authority’s decisions to be generally fair and consistent, within the framework of the tariff-based scheme. However, staff considered that with demanding throughput targets, there was a risk that some cases would be processed without all the facts being fully considered. Particularly in complex cases, key points might be missed, resulting in a decision which is not consistent with the scheme’s criteria. The Authority does not currently set targets covering the quality of its decision making.

3.20 In around two-thirds of reviews and appeals, earlier awards are upheld: during 1998-99, of the 17,900 cases which were reviewed, about one-third of awards were changed; of the 3,100 review decisions considered on appeal, about a

further third were changed. In the cases where the original decisions were not changed, they are likely to have been consistent with the scheme's criteria. In the cases where decisions are changed at review or appeal, 95 per cent of the changes were in the applicants' favour in 1998-99. It is, however, difficult to assess accurately the extent to which these changes result from inconsistent first decisions. Decisions made at further review or appeal to either uphold an award or change it can only give a broad indication of consistency, because any change may result from further evidence being provided by the applicant.

3.21 In order to explore this issue, we examined a sample of 100 review cases to establish the number of awards changed in which no new information had been provided. In 19 cases no further information had been submitted. In four of these the decision had been changed in favour of the applicant, indicating that the first decision could have been inconsistent. In the very high proportion of cases for which new information had been submitted when the original award was challenged (more than 80 per cent in our sample) the new information may have caused the reviewer to change the decision.

3.22 It was not possible to repeat this analysis for the appeals cases, because all cases involved oral hearings, where additional evidence may have been obtained from the applicant and any witnesses. The Appeals Panel considered that it made changes to awards mainly as a result of additional information obtained at the oral hearing. For example, the Panel obtains evidence on the incident which led to the injury directly through questioning police witnesses. It is also able to question applicants and, in some cases, the alleged assailant.

Combating fraud

3.23 The Authority operates a range of procedures that aim to deter and prevent fraud. The Authority also has controls in place designed to ensure that there is an appropriate separation of duties among staff.

3.24 The Authority's Security and Quality Unit (paragraph 3.14) examines all awards for which an offer has been made which exceeds a certain amount, as well as a random sample of awards below this amount to ensure, for example, that applications fulfil basic eligibility criteria and that police and medical reports are authentic. Two internal frauds committed against the Authority were identified in 1998. They involved the submission of fraudulent applications on behalf of fictitious clients supported by forged police and medical reports. In one fraud, an employee of the Authority had obtained £52,000 with applications worth a further £100,000 submitted before the fraud was detected. The employee and her

husband were convicted of obtaining money transfers by deception. In the second case, a member of staff, an ex-member of staff and two others were convicted of obtaining a money order by deception and conspiracy. The members of staff were dismissed. Increased controls introduced since the discovery of the frauds include date stamping of all reports received in the post room; improved reporting and monitoring through the Authority's computer system; and sampling of incoming police and medical reports to confirm authenticity.

3.25 The Authority has taken action aimed at minimising the risk of fraud. However, it does not employ the following practices which are used elsewhere:

- checking whether any other applications have been made from the same address; and
- data matching with other organisations, such as the Department of Social Security and insurance companies, to identify any applicants who have been engaged in fraudulent activity elsewhere.

3.26 The Authority's internal auditor has praised the Authority's response to the frauds that were identified in 1998. In a review of the Authority's corporate governance the internal auditor commented, however, that a formal risk assessment had not been undertaken for the organisation as a whole, and the Authority is considering the actions it needs to take to address this finding.

Recommendations

10. The Home Office and the Scottish Executive should consider giving the Authority some responsibility for recruiting and selecting staff.
11. The Authority should review the content, timing and delivery of its training programmes. Whenever possible training should be timely; for example, induction training should as far as possible follow closely the date on which staff join the Authority. Line managers should be drawn into the review to ensure a good match between the training on offer and what they subsequently expect of their staff.
12. The Authority should finalise the quality assurance section of the guidance manual, and should consider the options for making the manual more reliable, including providing a CD ROM or intranet-based version that permits free-text searching.

- 13.** There should be more detailed guidance to staff working in the Security and Quality Control Unit, covering: the rationale and need for tests; targets for the number of cases to be examined; and advice on what constitutes an acceptable level of error.
- 14.** Where the Appeals Panels comes to a different decision on a case from the Authority’s review decision, the presenting officer should ensure that the reasons for change are identified and fed back to the relevant review section. Reasons for changed awards at review should also be communicated to decision-makers and caseworkers, so that they can learn from the case.
- 15.** The Authority should monitor reasons for changes in decisions to identify common inconsistencies in operating the scheme’s criteria and any patterns, including information which might have been obtained earlier from the applicant, and take action to address the problems identified.
- 16.** The Authority should build upon its recent work to review the consistency and quality of decision making by carrying out regular sample checks of work at first decision and review stages, and monitoring against appropriate targets. The targets should be designed to encourage a culture of getting cases “right first time”, to reduce the proportion of decisions changed at review or appeal, and thereby reduce the incentive for applicants to contest decisions.

Part 4: How quickly applications for compensation are processed

4.1 It is important to victims of crime that applications for criminal injuries compensation are decided as quickly as possible. The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority recognises this and places considerable emphasis on timeliness as an aspect of customer care. In this part of the report we examine:

- the speed of resolving applications;
- how the Authority and the Appeals Panel are performing against their targets;
- applicants' views on the time taken to resolve applications; and
- the factors affecting the resolution of applications.

Speed of resolving applications

4.2 One of the reasons for replacing the original common law scheme with the tariff-based scheme (paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5) was to speed up the processing of applications. Though the data available to compare the two schemes' performance are on slightly different bases, they show that quicker processing has been achieved:

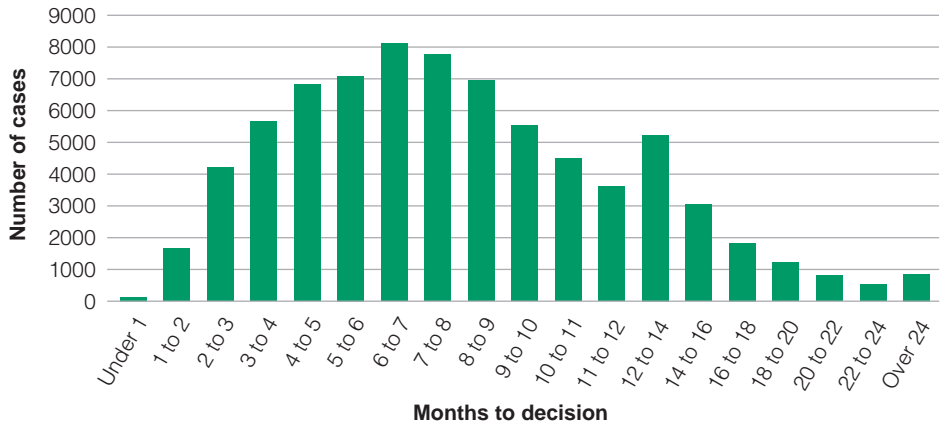
- between 1992-93 and 1995-96, around 40 per cent of applications took more than 12 months to resolve at first decision stage and around 50 per cent at the appeals stage; whereas
- during 1998-99, the Authority issued 82 per cent of first decisions within 12 months of case opening, and 93 per cent of appeals were heard and resolved within a year of being requested.

4.3 During 1998-99, the Authority took, on average, 8.4 months to process an application from receipt of the application to issue of first decision; six months from the receipt of a request for a review to the issue of a review decision; and 7.8 months from the receipt of an appeal to the Appeals Panel's decision (Figure 18). We estimate that the average time taken for the resolution of a typical case was 11.7 months, which included more than a month during which the Authority was awaiting the applicant's responses. For cases not resolved until appeal, the average elapsed time from initial application to a hearing was 25 months.

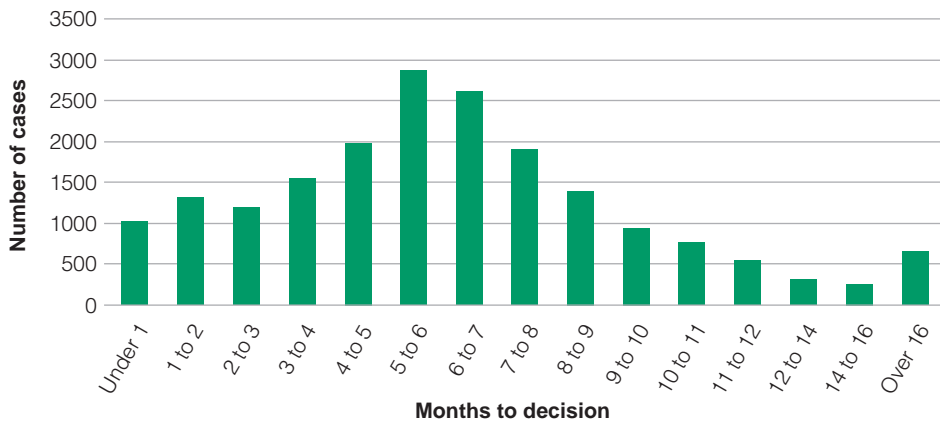
Processing speeds during 1998-99

Figure 18

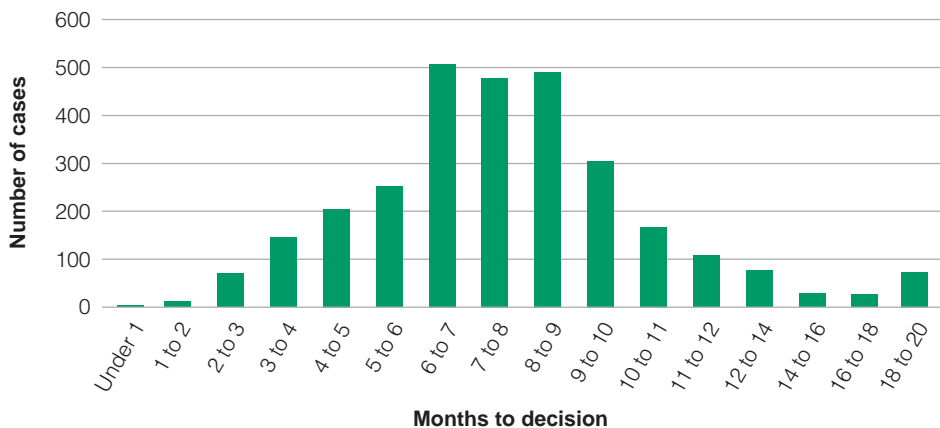
From receipt of application to first decision: average 8.4 months; 82 per cent of decisions issued within 12 months.



From request for a review to issue of review decision: average 6 months; 94 per cent of review decisions issued within 12 months.



From request for an appeal to appeal decision: average 7.8 months; 93 per cent of appeal decisions issued within 12 months.



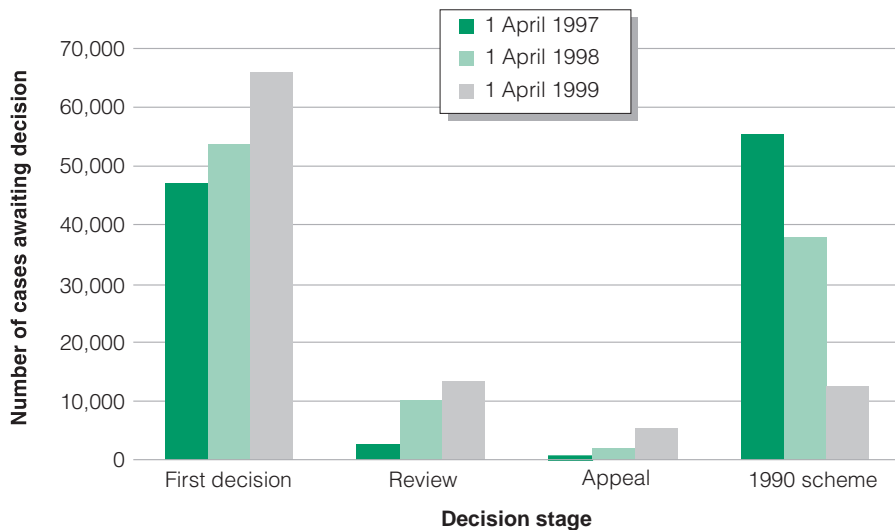
Source: National Audit Office analysis of Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority and Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel management information

4.4 Figure 19 shows that the levels of reviews and appeals waiting to be worked on at April 1997 were low, as might be expected because the scheme had been running for only a year and relatively few cases would have reached review or appeal. Though applications are being processed more quickly under the new scheme, the numbers of applications waiting to be worked on have steadily accumulated. An important factor underlying the growth has been the need for resources to be directed at clearing outstanding cases under the previous scheme, which were substantially reduced in the three years to April 1999 (Figure 19). Over the same period, the total number of applications outstanding under both schemes fell by 8 per cent, to around 97,000. At 1 April 1999, applications awaiting decisions under the tariff-based scheme stood at nearly 85,000, of which around 13,000 cases awaited a decision at review, and more than 5,400 cases awaited resolution at appeal. Outstanding cases under the 1990 scheme were reduced from some 55,000 to around 12,500.

Cases awaiting a decision by decision stage, 1997 to 1999

Figure 19

Between 1 April 1997 and 1 April 1999 tariff-based cases waiting to be worked on increased to nearly 85,000, of which around 13,000 were awaiting reviews and almost 5,400 were appeals. In the same period, cases outstanding under the 1990 scheme were substantially reduced, so that there was an overall reduction of 8 per cent in cases outstanding under both schemes.



Source: National Audit Office analysis of Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority management information

Performance against targets

4.5 With the scheme having started in 1996, there was limited experience of its operation to guide target setting in the first three years, and target setting was also complicated by the need to continue to work on cases under the previous scheme. Nonetheless, while the Authority is not yet meeting its customer service target to issue 90 per cent of first decisions within 12 months, Figure 20 shows that it almost

met the target in 1997-98, achieving 88 per cent, and came fairly close in 1998-99, achieving 82 per cent. In contrast, performance on issuing review decisions fell well short of the specified timescales (Figure 20). The Authority has recognised that review work needs to be better resourced, but as reviews have to be handled by less numerous senior staff, the targets may also need to be examined to ensure that they are feasible. In 1998-99, because of delays in the preparation of appeals for hearings, the Appeals Panel resolved only 42 per cent of appeals within six months against its target of 80 per cent, but had achieved the target in the previous year.

Performance against speed of processing targets in 1997-98 and 1998-99

Figure 20

The Authority came close to its processing target for first decisions; review decisions fell well short of the specified timescales; performance on appeals fell in 1998-99 when there were delays in the preparation of appeals for hearings.

Target	1997-98 Performance	1998-99 Performance
First decision		
Issue 90 per cent of decisions within 12 months of receipt of the application.	88 per cent achieved	82 per cent achieved
Review		
Where no further enquiries needed, issue a decision within four weeks of request for review.	No data collected for these targets	12 per cent achieved
Where further enquiries needed, issue a decision within two weeks of the receipt of responses.	before 1998-99	21 per cent achieved
Appeal		
Decide 80 per cent of appeals within six months of receipt of a notice of appeal.	82 per cent achieved ¹	42 per cent achieved ¹

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority and Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel management information

Note: 1. Includes cases decided without a hearing and cases withdrawn by the appellant before the hearing. 22 per cent of appeals cases involving an oral hearing were resolved within target in 1998-99.

4.6 There were differences in the levels of outstanding applications in the Authority's two offices; in February 1999, 23 per cent of the London office's first decision workload comprised applications which had been with the Authority for 12 months or more, whereas in Glasgow the proportion was 14 per cent.

4.7 As the Authority's and the Appeals Panel's targets focus on the percentage of cases closed by a target date, there is a risk that they distract attention from any build-up of outstanding cases that have already missed the target, though the Panel monitors its smaller volume of outstanding cases on a monthly basis.

Additional targets would be helpful, for example on the average time for processing applications, coupled with monitoring to pick up all long outstanding cases.

Applicants' views on the time taken to resolve applications

4.8 The views of applicants responding to our survey on the time taken to resolve applications for compensation were fairly evenly spread (Figure 21): 44 per cent considered that the time taken to resolve their application was about what they expected or quicker, but nearly a quarter considered their application had taken much longer than expected. Those applicants who had received awards tended to be more content with the time taken to resolve applications than those who had not received an award (Figure 21(a)).

4.9 Levels of satisfaction were highest among applicants whose applications were resolved at the first decision stage, but the difference was not marked. Around a fifth of applicants were very dissatisfied for all three decision stages (Figure 21(b)).

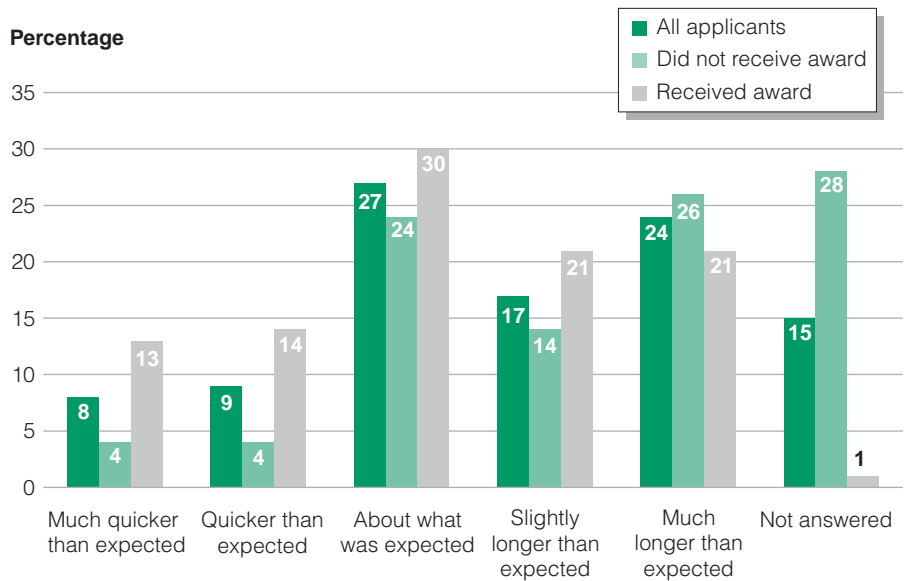
4.10 Organisations representing applicants were concerned about the speed of reaching first decisions and the potentially long delays in the Authority completing reviews and in the Panel listing appeal hearings. The Police Federation of England and Wales, which deals with around 2,000 applications for compensation each year, told us that they considered the length of time spent resolving cases to be unacceptable. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, which may assist with applications in cases of child abuse, told us that processing can be efficient in the initial stages but lengthy later on, and commented that delays made it difficult for the victim to “put their experiences behind them and move forward”. The Appeals Panel told us that there can be delays in listing cases involving police and child victims as the applicant often chooses to provide further medical evidence.

Applicants' views on the time taken to resolve applications

Figure 21

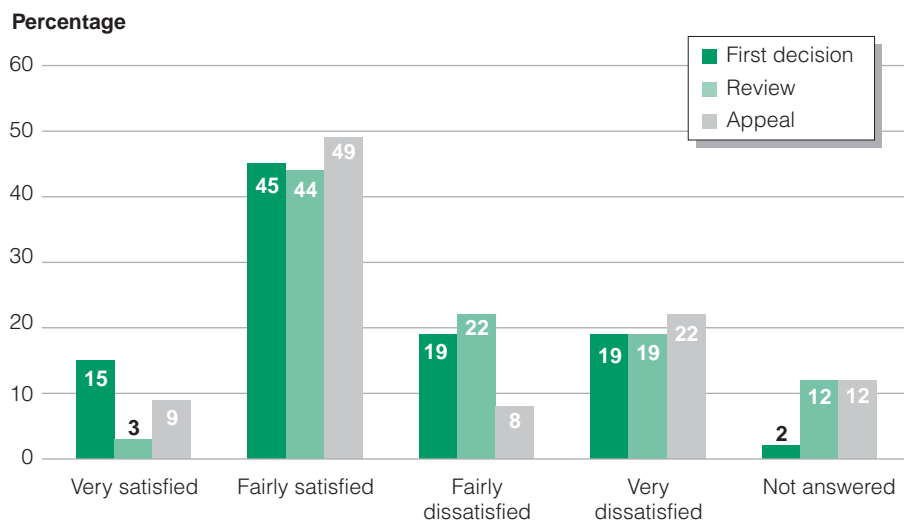
44 per cent of all applicants considered that the time taken to resolve their application was about what they expected or quicker, but nearly a quarter considered it to be much longer than they expected. Satisfaction was generally lower among applicants who did not receive an award, and a greater proportion of these applicants did not respond to the survey.

(a) All applicants; applicants who received/did not receive an award



There were no marked differences between the levels of satisfaction of applicants whose applications were resolved at different stages.

(b) Applicants with claims resolved at first decision, review, and appeal



Source: National Audit Office survey of applicants

Factors affecting the resolution of applications

4.11 We examined the various stages of processing of applications in order to identify bottlenecks and the factors affecting the speed with which applications are resolved.

Factors affecting first decisions

4.12 We examined a sample of 98 applications received in May 1998. Using this sample, we examined the four stages of processing:

- stage 1: from receipt of application to the Authority's request of initial police and medical reports;
- stage 2: from the request to the receipt of initial police and medical reports;
- stage 3: from the receipt of initial police and medical reports to the receipt of the last piece of information; and
- stage 4: from the receipt of the last piece of information to the issue of a decision.

4.13 Not all causes of delay are wholly within the Authority's control. Stages 1 and 4 involve activities over which the Authority has full control and for which specific customer service targets have been set. Figure 22 shows the time spent at each stage, distinguishing between cases in our sample lasting under 200 days, over 365 days and in between. The results of this analysis are striking, in that most of the variation in average total time taken was attributable to variation in the average length of stage 3.

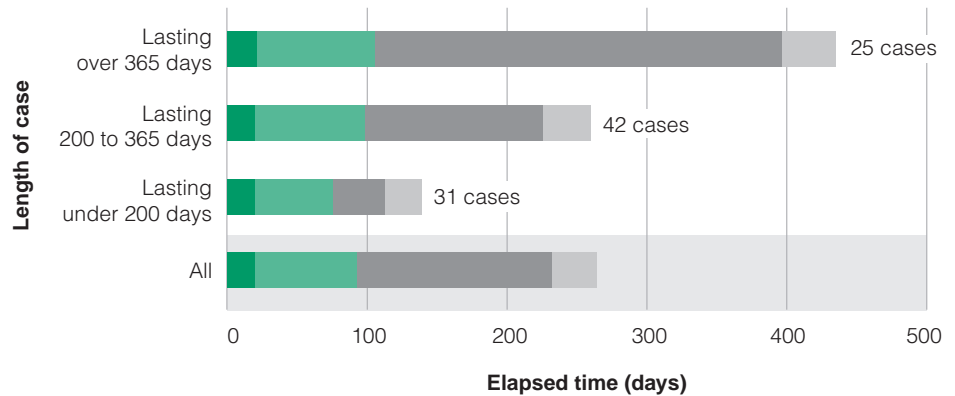
First decision stage 1: requesting initial reports from the police and medical authorities

4.14 The Authority has a stage 1 target of sending out routine enquiry forms to the police and medical authorities within two weeks of receiving an application. The main requirement at this stage is for the caseworker to establish the salient facts of the case such as the date and location of the incident for recording on the Authority's information system and on the request for reports. Any delays at this stage therefore relate to the levels of available staff or efficiency.

Time spent at different stages of first decision

Figure 22

Most of the time taken to process cases at first decision stage is attributable to the time it takes to complete stage 3.



- Stage 1: from receipt of application to the Authority's initial request of police/medical reports
- Stage 2: from request to receipt of initial police/medical reports
- Stage 3: from receipt of initial police/medical reports to the receipt of last information
- Stage 4: from receipt of last information to the issue of a decision

Source: National Audit Office analysis of a sample of 98 applications made in May 1998

4.15 In our sample, the target to send out routine enquiry forms within two weeks was achieved in only two of the 98 cases. The average time taken was 20 days. Since we undertook our examination the Authority has improved its performance in this area and, by late 1999, the target was being achieved.

First decision stage 2: receipt of reports from the police and medical authorities

4.16 There is no statutory requirement for the Authority to obtain police and medical reports, but in practice they provide essential evidence of eligibility and the appropriate tariff-scale of any award. Police reports normally provide information about the crime incident and any criminal records of the applicant. Medical reports describe the injuries sustained by the applicant and give a prognosis. The police do not charge the Authority for reports; the doctor (or the employing hospital) receives an agreed fee of £28 for medical reports. For cases in our sample the Authority spent more than 70 days on average awaiting the receipt of both the police and medical reports. Typically, one of these reports was received after 50 days, but the other took a further 20 days to arrive.

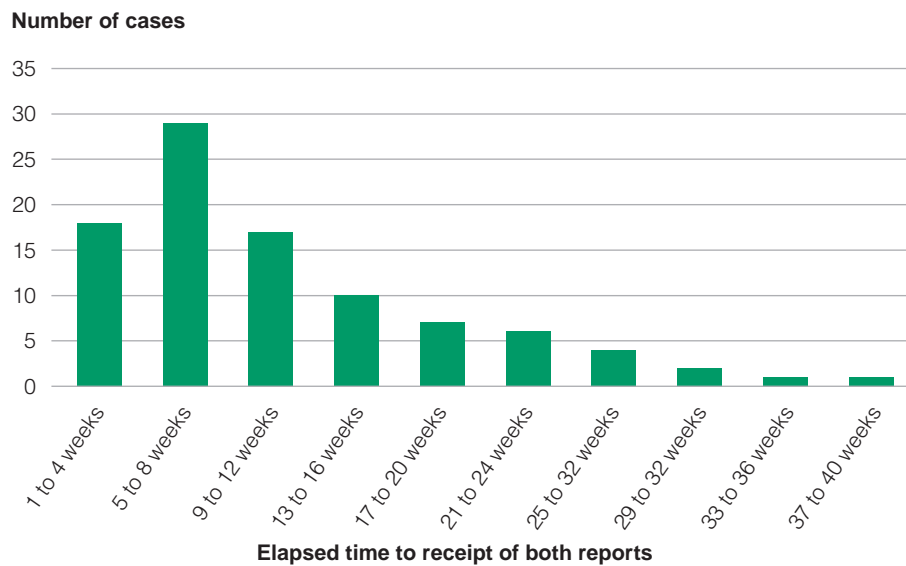
4.17 The Authority sends reminder letters automatically to police forces and medical agencies once a report has been outstanding for more than 90 days, or 30 days if the case is a high priority. If no report is received within a further 60 days, the caseworker makes telephone contact. During 1998-99 the Authority requested 78,600 reports from police forces, including 804 priority requests. Automatic reminders were later required for half of the priority requests and a quarter of the ordinary requests. In 1998-99, the Authority requested 61,600 medical reports from 1,048 hospitals and sent automatic reminders for a quarter of these requests.

4.18 For our sample of cases, almost half of police and medical reports were received within 8 weeks of the request. However, in a third of applications in our sample, at least one of the two requested reports remained outstanding 13 weeks or more after the initial request (Figure 23).

Speed of receipt of both police and medical reports

Figure 23

While almost half of Authority requests for both police and medical reports produced responses within 8 weeks, in a third of cases at least one of the requested reports remained outstanding after 13 weeks or more.



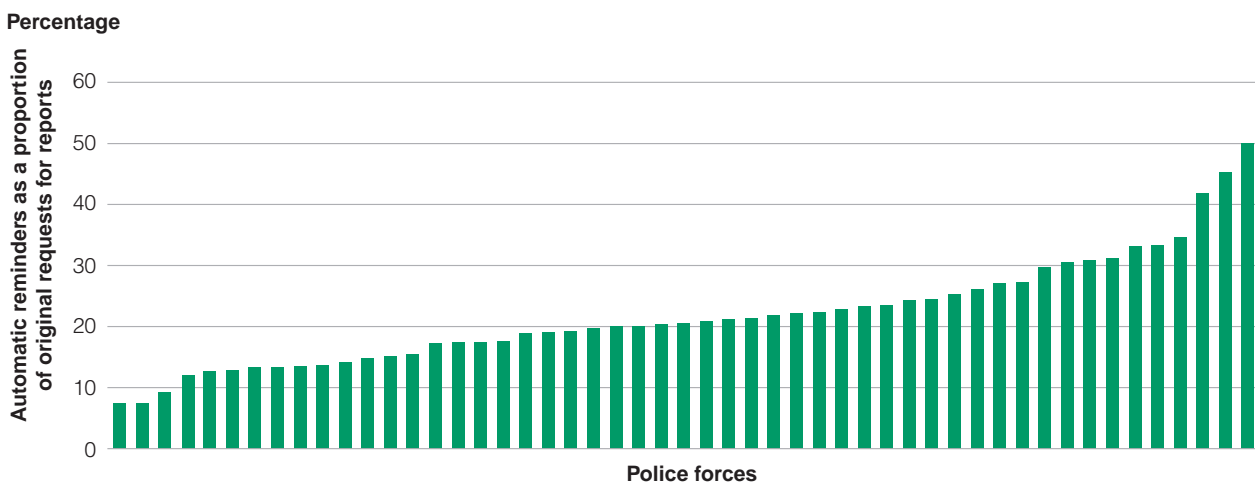
Source: National Audit Office analysis of a sample of 98 applications made in May 1998

4.19 The rates at which reminder requests had to be issued varied widely between individual police forces and hospitals. In 1998-99, the Authority sent automatic reminders in over 40 per cent of cases relating to three police forces, whereas reminders were needed in less than 10 per cent of requests made to three other forces (Figure 24). For hospitals, the variations were still greater (Figure 25): we examined the responses of the 195 hospitals to which the Authority sent 100 or more requests for reports during 1998-99, and found that for four hospitals the Authority had to send reminders chasing more than three-quarters of original requests. In contrast, 34 hospitals required reminders in less than 10 per cent of cases. Based on our sample of first decision cases, general practices took on average 43 days to return medical reports, whereas hospitals took 53 days.

Figure 24

Automatic reminders for police reports, 1998-99

Police forces vary in the extent to which the Authority has to send them automatic reminders for police reports.

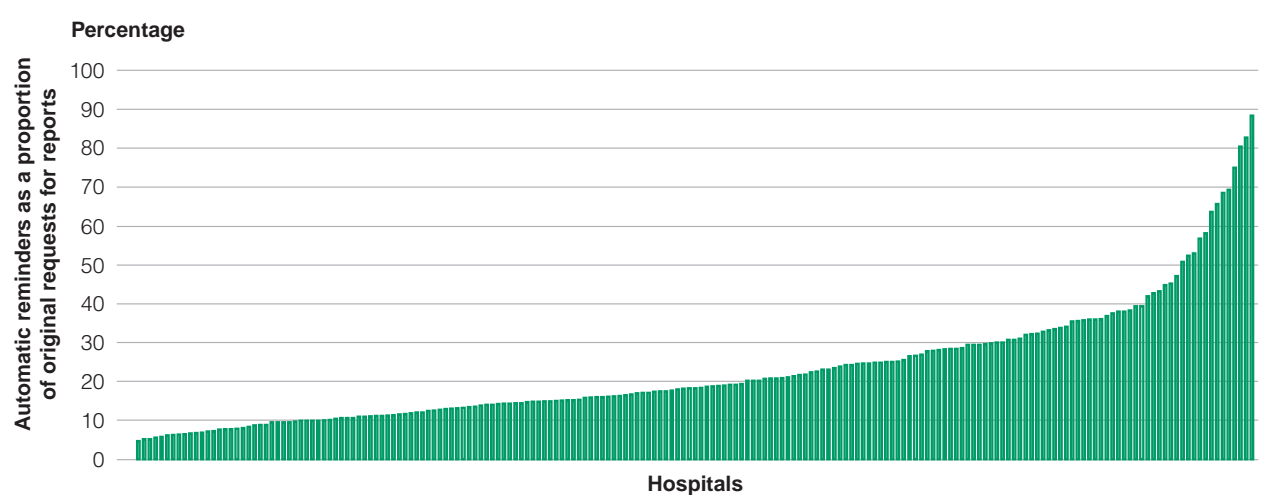


Source: National Audit Office analysis of Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority management information

4.20 The British Medical Association commented that, for reports requested from general practitioners, delays can arise from the need to glean relevant information from the patient’s medical record, which may be very lengthy, for example for older patients who make regular visits to their GP, and because the doctor’s clinical duties take priority. The National Health Service Executive added that, since responses to Authority requests are not within doctors’ terms and conditions of service, the Executive is unable to make doctors provide a speedier response.

Figure 25 Automatic reminders for medical reports, 1998-99

There is wide variation among hospitals in the extent to which the Authority has to send automatic reminders to chase medical reports.



Note: Based on the 195 hospitals from which at least 100 medical reports were requested by the Authority during 1998-99
 Source: National Audit Office analysis of Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority management information

4.21 Our survey of police forces indicated that some forces nominate administrative staff to handle requests, whilst others forward them directly to the police officer responsible for the case, although this can lead to delays if the officer has moved to another station or is engaged in priority crime work. Half of the forces said that they set internal targets for responding to requests, ranging from two to four weeks. More than half of forces felt that their communications with the Authority could be improved in the future by using e-mail, but less than a third considered that this was feasible now. The Appeals Panel told us that it would welcome an e-mail facility with the police, which it had explored previously with the Home Office. At that time the Home Office had felt that such a facility was not possible, but the Panel intends to take up the matter again.

4.22 A number of forces said that the Authority’s requests for reports sometimes provide insufficient or inaccurate information, making it difficult to respond quickly. For example, in some cases no crime incident number is provided, or details of the police station or the crime incident date are incorrect. Requests are occasionally sent to the wrong part of a force or to the wrong force altogether. Case 7 summarises the information received by a force in a case where the crime incident was not identifiable. Two-thirds of respondent forces said that the Authority sometimes sent unnecessary reminders where reports had already been provided.

**Example of an
inadequately completed
request for a police report**

Case 7

*Details provided to
the police force*

Incident location:	'Local bingo' (no address provided)
Incident date/report date:	'1998' (date/month not given)
Where reported:	'Northumberland Police Station' (The county of Northumberland has 15 police stations within five area commands.)
Name and number of officer:	Blank
Names of victim and alleged offender:	Details provided

Source: Northumbria Police

4.23 The Authority has to strike a balance between obtaining as much information as possible from applicants and not making the process of applying for compensation unduly onerous for applicants, some of whom will be suffering distress. At the same time, it is in the applicant's interest to provide full information, because not doing so can slow the progress of their application. We consider that these are matters that need to be explored jointly with police forces, since the police are the originators of much of the information required to apply for a police report.

4.24 The Authority does not have any formal agreements with police forces or hospitals about how long it should take for reports to be returned. The greatest early benefits might be drawn from such agreements if the Authority were to start by approaching those police forces and hospitals which receive the largest number of requests for reports and with the slowest records of responses. The Authority could also explore with the police whether victims of crime could be routinely provided with a standard record of the crime details, which they would be advised to retain in case they needed it at a later date.

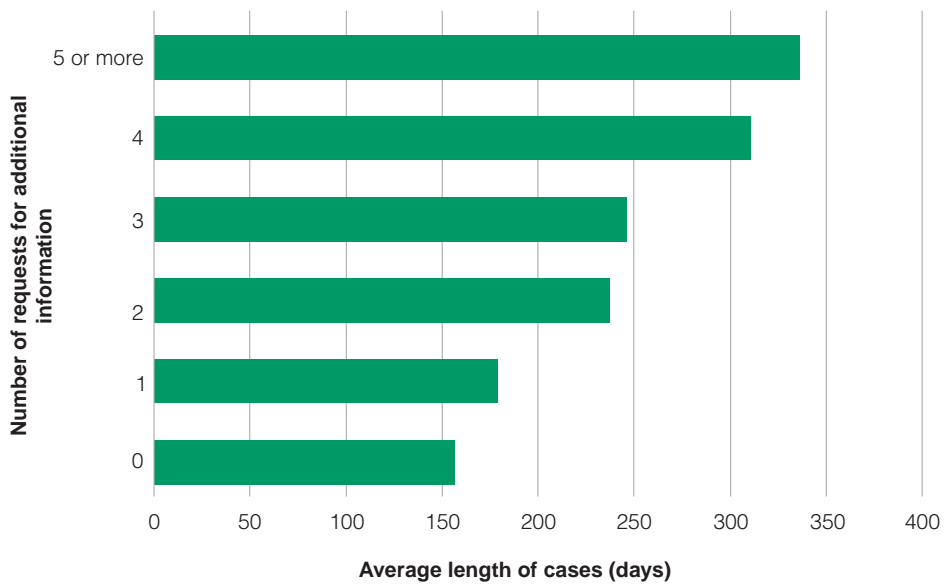
First decision stage 3: receipt of last piece of information

4.25 Stage 3 accounts on average for about half of total processing time (Figure 22). Of our sample of 98 cases received in May 1998, only 18 were decided on the basis of the standard police and medical reports. In the other 80 cases, a total of 211 requests were made for additional information, mainly from the applicant or further medical or police reports. On average two pieces of additional information were requested, although our sample included two cases in which nine additional reports were requested. The 18 cases requiring no additional information took 157 days on average to resolve, whilst the remaining cases took on average 237 days. We found that each additional request added around 30 days on average to the overall length of the case (Figure 26).

Impact of requests for additional information on average length of case

Figure 26

In 80 of the 98 cases we examined, a total of 211 requests for additional information were made. The more information requested the longer the case took, adding 30 days per additional request on average.



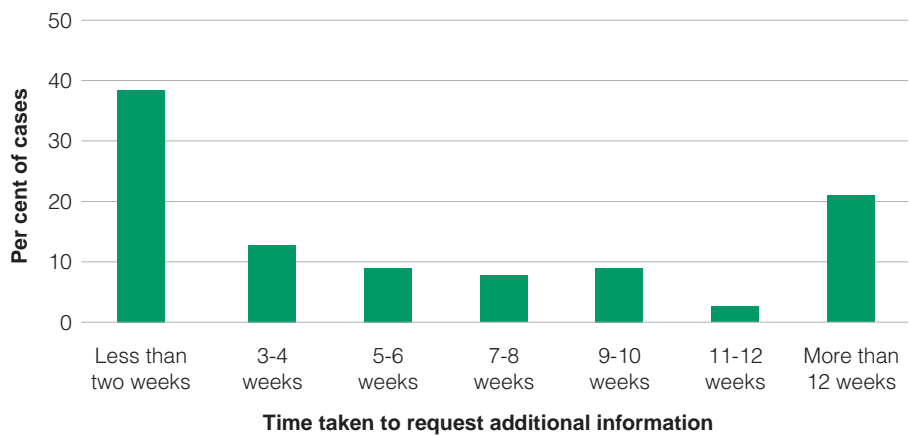
Source: National Audit Office analysis of a sample of 98 applications made in May 1998

4.26 For nearly one in five of the cases in our sample, there was a delay of more than 12 weeks between receipt of the medical and police reports and the request for further information, though in half of the cases, the delay was four weeks or less (Figure 27a). In some cases, the delay was then compounded by the applicant or other recipient of the request: in two-thirds of the cases in our sample, the response came within six weeks, but for almost one in seven requests, the replies were received more than twelve weeks after the request was made, with 14 still outstanding at the time of our review (Figure 27b). The Authority’s staff suggested that one factor in the delay was lack of staff to request and chase individual pieces of outstanding information. During 1998-99, average staffing levels were 7 per cent below complement (Figure 28). Unlike the automatic reminders for police and medical reports, there is no effective system for flagging the need to chase small outstanding pieces of information.

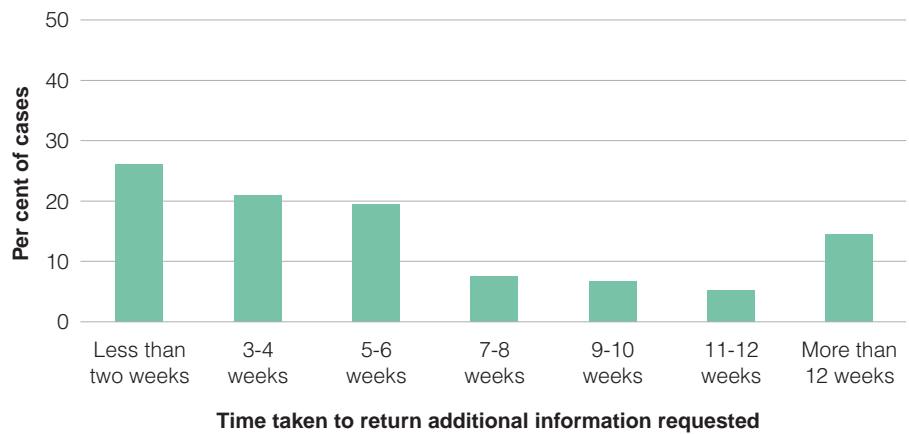
Time taken to request and receive additional information

Figure 27

(a) In almost 40 per cent of cases, there was a delay of less than two weeks between receipt of the medical and police reports and the Authority's request for additional information. In nearly one in five cases, however, there was a delay of more than 12 weeks between receipt of the medical and police reports and the request for additional information.



(b) In around one in four cases, replies for additional information were received within two weeks of the request for that information. In nearly one in seven cases, however, there was a delay of more than 12 weeks between the request for additional information and its receipt.

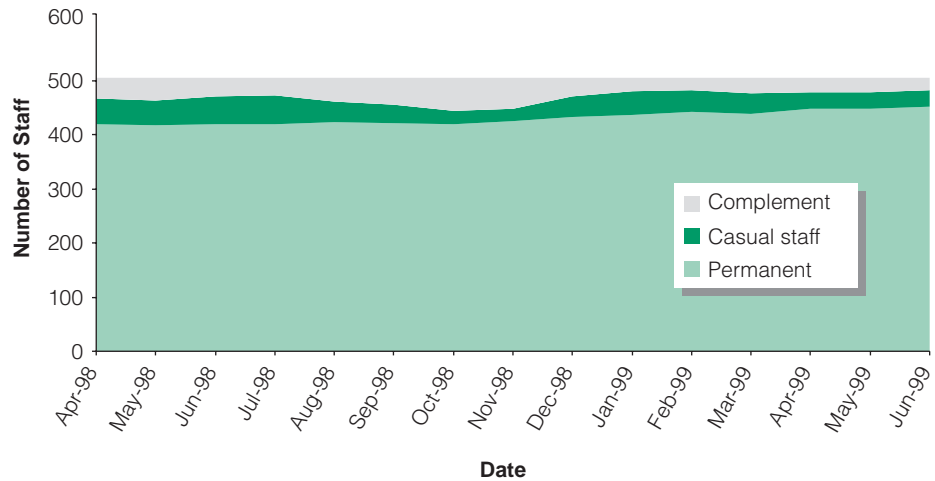


Source: National Audit Office analysis of a sample of 98 applications made in May 1998

Staff numbers compared to complement, April 1998 to June 1999

Figure 28

During 1998-99 staff levels at the Authority averaged 7 per cent below complement.



Source: National Audit Office analysis of Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority management information

First decision stage 4: issuing the decision

4.27 The Authority’s Stage 4 target is to issue a first decision within four weeks of the receipt of responses to all its enquiries. During the first half of 1999 overall monthly performance varied from a high of 80 per cent of all cases being decided within four weeks and a low of 59 per cent. For our sample cases, 70 per cent of first decisions had been issued within four weeks of receiving the last piece of information but one in eight took more than 12 weeks (Figure 29). As with stage 1, any delays at stage 4 generally relate to levels of available staff or efficiency.

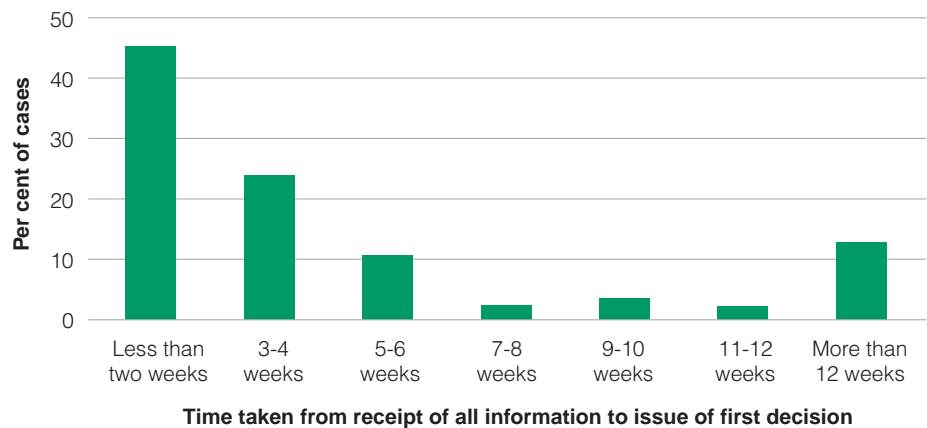
Factors affecting reviews

4.28 The Authority issued less than one-quarter of review decisions within target during 1998-99 (Figure 20), and there are no indications of improvement during 1999-2000. For the first six months of 1999, in the 37 per cent of review cases in which no further enquiries were required, only 12 per cent of review decisions were issued within the target of four weeks. In the remaining cases, which involved further enquiries, only 22 per cent were resolved by the target of within two weeks of completion of these enquiries.

Time taken to issue a decision after receipt of last piece of information

Figure 29

The Authority's target is to issue a first decision within four weeks of the receipt of responses to all its enquiries. Nearly 70 per cent of the cases in our sample¹ had been decided within target. However, one in eight took more than 12 weeks from the receipt of all the information to first decision.



Source: National Audit Office analysis of a sample of 98 applications made in May 1998

Note: The analysis includes 84 out of the 98 cases, since in 14 cases the requested information had still not been received.

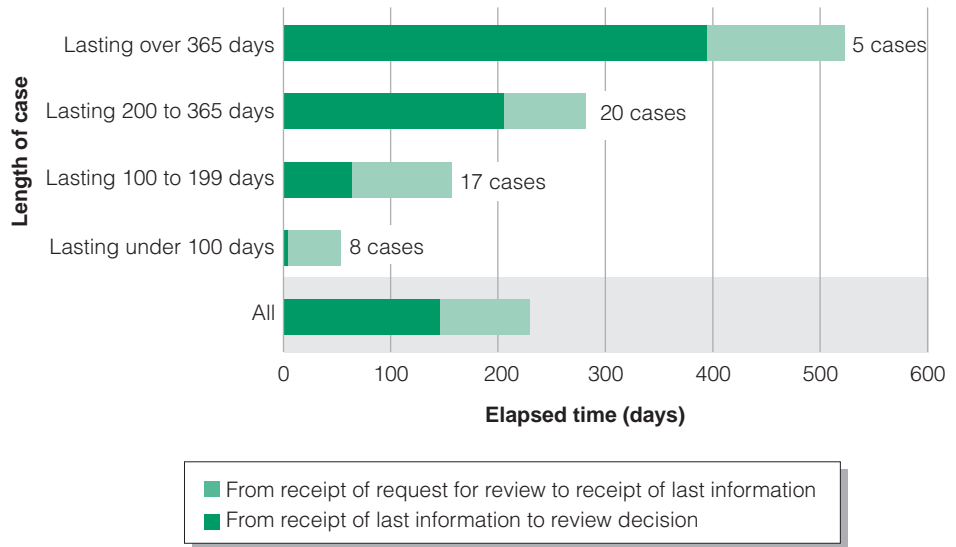
4.29 Our analysis of a sample of 50 case files decided at review showed that, on average, review decisions were issued in 17 weeks in the 19 cases where no further enquiries were needed. In the 31 remaining cases where further enquiries were necessary, decisions were issued on average nine weeks after receipt of final information. Figure 30 shows the sample analysed by the time spent at review for individual cases, and that for cases lasting under 200 days most of the time taken was from receipt of the last piece of information to the review decision.

4.30 The Authority attributes delays in completing reviews to the backlog that accumulated, particularly between April 1997 and April 1998 (Figure 19, page 48), which was caused partly by an initial underestimation of the level of applications for the new review process, and partly by subsequent problems in acquiring the number of staff required. More senior officers undertake reviews. The ratio of review officers to the less senior caseworking staff on first decisions is 1:4, which is broadly similar to the ratio of review cases to all applications. However, review cases are more likely to involve the evaluation of complex material and the use of legal advice by the applicant. The Authority assesses that current staffing levels for reviews match incoming workload, but it is using other options, such as inviting experienced first decision staff to undertake overtime to review cases, to help to reduce the backlog.

Processing times by length of case at review

Figure 30

Although the main processing element at the review stage is the time taken to obtain further information, the time taken to issue a decision is also substantial and is the largest element for cases lasting 200 days or less.



Source: National Audit Office analysis of a sample of 50 cases settled at review during the first quarter of 1999

Factors affecting appeals

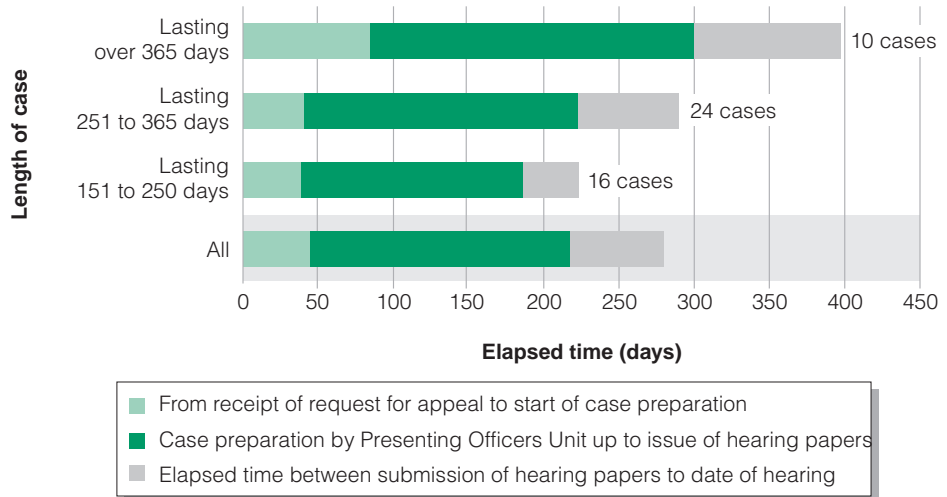
4.31 During 1998-99, the Appeals Panel achieved 42 per cent of appeals resolved within six months against a target of 80 per cent – on average appeals took eight months to resolve – and there was no improvement during the first six months of 1999. Our sample of 50 cases decided at appeal took on average nine months to resolve (Figure 31).

4.32 Appeal cases require the Authority’s Presenting Officers Unit to review evidence in the light of previous stages and make further enquiries if necessary; to collate evidence; to prepare the case for a hearing; and to issue the appeal papers to the applicant for agreement and to the Panel, which arranges an oral hearing. Figure 32 shows the detailed processing activities of the Authority’s Presenting Officers Unit and the Appeals Panel. In our sample cases, almost two-thirds of the time up to the appeal hearing was taken up by preparation of the case.

Processing times by length of case for appeals

Figure 31

Almost two-thirds of the time up to the appeal hearing was taken by preparation of the case by the Presenting Officers Unit.



Source: National Audit Office analysis of a sample of 50 cases settled at appeal during the first quarter of 1999

Figure 32

Processing activities at appeal: the Authority's Presenting Officers Unit and the Appeals Panel

Presenting Officer

Panel

Activity

- Assess evidence from first decision and review.
- Gather further information to resolve ambiguities or gaps in evidence where necessary (required in around 60 per cent of cases).
- Collate evidence and identify and summarise issues for the applicant and the Appeals Panel to consider.
- Assemble key documents in a 'hearing bundle', for applicant and the Panel.
- Present the case at the hearing, question witnesses, make submissions on the facts and application of the tariff and generally assist the Panel in its work.

- Arrange programme of hearings, for a six-month period in advance, liaising with the Presenting Officers Unit on the listing of hearings.
- Send cases which are 'obviously unmeritorious' to a single adjudicator or chairman for resolution if appropriate without a hearing (around 10 per cent of requests for appeal). These cases include those where incidents giving rise to the injury are clearly outside the scope of the scheme.
- Decide remaining cases in an oral hearing, normally before three Panel members, including a legally qualified member. Evidence heard from the applicant and witnesses.

Staff

12 Presenting Officers (higher executive officers) and 18 other staff.

50 Panel members and 70 administrative staff.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority and Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel management information; staffing figures as at March 1999.

4.33 The Authority and the Appeals Panel told us that the reasons that the target was not being met include the inherent complexity of some cases, a lack of experienced staff in some important positions, the need to obtain additional information on cases from external organisations, and the backlog that has built up since the scheme began four years ago. The target has not been reviewed since the start of the scheme, and the Authority and Panel have agreed that it is timely to examine each stage of the appeal process to identify and address causes of delay, in order to secure maximum efficiency.

4.34 The Authority considers, and the Appeals Panel agrees, that a lack of experienced staff in the Presenting Officers Unit has contributed to the delays. The Authority consequently took a decision to increase the Unit's staff complement by nine to 39 in the first quarter of 1999-2000. Because of recruitment difficulties and training needs it has, however, taken some time between the decision and the point when the new staff are able to contribute fully to the work of the Unit. The Home Office has since approved a further temporary increase to a complement of 50 staff to help ensure that the backlog of appeals is dealt with as quickly as possible.

Recommendations

17. The Authority should examine staffing needs in all parts of its operation, particularly on reviews and the preparation of appeals, and should consider any potentially beneficial reallocation of resources. Though in the short-term the scope for simple reallocation between one part of the process to another is likely to be limited, there are prospects for workload reductions in the medium and longer term, for example once there are no remaining applications to be dealt with under the previous scheme. The Authority should discuss with the Home Office (and, as appropriate the Scottish Executive) issues of complement, recruitment and retention of staff, and the business case for new working practices, as well as the areas for improved efficiency identified in this report.
18. Though for senior staff this examination needs to start with the most pressing issues such as review cases, the Authority should also examine how senior and more experienced staff could help less experienced junior colleagues to improve their efficiency.
19. The Authority should examine the scope for further automation of the process, for example to prompt caseworkers where small pieces of additional information are still outstanding.

- 20.** The Authority should negotiate service level agreements with police forces and larger hospitals, focusing first on those which require the largest number of reminders. The agreements should clarify working practices and set out agreed response times and should cover agreed methods for ensuring that victims have a record of the details of the crime, which they can refer to in any application under the scheme.
- 21.** In reviewing appeals generally and the work of the Presenting Officers Unit, the Authority and the Appeals Panel should review the current targets, and if necessary seek permission from the Home Office to revise them to ensure that they are stretching but achievable. The targets should reflect the expectations and concerns of applicants and the public that applications and appeals should be dealt with as expeditiously as possible.
- 22.** The Authority and the Appeals Panel should consider supplementing their existing targets with additional targets focusing on the average time taken to deal with a case. The length of outstanding cases should be closely monitored with a view to keeping delays to a minimum.

Part 5: Processing applications

5.1 This part of the report examines the efficiency with which the Authority and the Appeals Panel process applications for criminal injuries compensation. It assesses current levels of efficiency in processing, through:

- external benchmarking of the Authority's performance and processing efficiency with three private sector insurance companies; and
- internal comparison of unit costs with those under the previous scheme and between the Glasgow and London offices.

It then explores the scope for improvement in the Authority's systems and processes to enhance efficiency and effectiveness.

Current levels of processing efficiency

External comparisons with insurance companies

5.2 We commissioned management consultants to benchmark the Authority's performance and processes against those of comparable private sector organisations. Appendix 1, paragraph 2 describes the work in more detail. Three insurance companies involved with the settlement of compensation claims for personal injuries were selected as the comparators. The purpose of the benchmarking was to establish how well the Authority compared against the insurance companies and to identify the scope for improving performance.

5.3 Differences between the type and complexity of the work of the insurance companies and cases of criminal injuries compensation meant that the results of the benchmarking needed to be carefully assessed. However, together with our consultants we judged the results of the benchmarking to be broadly valid and usable.

5.4 Evidence from the performance element of the benchmarking indicated that the Authority's productivity levels compare well with the three comparators (Figure 33). The consultants also commented that staff pay and grading in the Authority appeared to be lower. However, we would have required much more precise information on the content of different jobs in order to draw a clear

conclusion from this observation, and we would have needed more information than the companies were willing to disclose in order to see how any relative salary differences impacted on comparative unit costs.

Comparison of productivity in processing compensation applications with that of three private sector insurance companies

Figure 33

The Authority's productivity compared well with that of the private sector insurance companies.

	Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority	Range in private sector comparators
Completions per day per main caseworker	2.5	1 to 2.5
Caseload per caseworker ¹	220 to 250	250 to 300
Average time taken to clear a case (days)	355 ²	480 to 680

Source: Benchmarking comparison of 1998-99 performance data from the Authority and three private sector insurance companies dealing with personal injury claims

Notes: 1. the Authority's lower caseload to some extent reflects the lower average time to clear a case
2. based on the time taken to resolve an average case (paragraph 4.3)

5.5 Our consultants compared some of the main processes operated in the Authority and the companies. All used similar systems and computer software to process cases, reflecting the similar nature of the businesses, and indicating that the Authority has systems which are fit for their purpose. Our consultants concluded that the Authority's processes were comparable to those of the comparators.

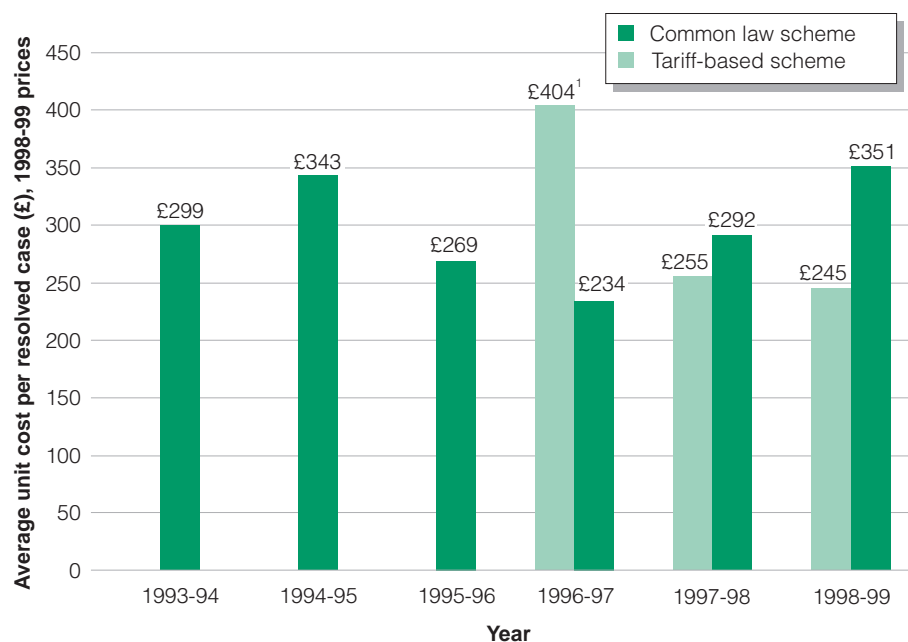
Comparison of unit administration costs under the current and previous schemes

5.6 Average unit administrative costs for processing applications under the tariff-based scheme are about a fifth lower than under the previous scheme, reflecting expectations that the current scheme would be more straightforward to administer and that the tariff-based scheme provides for decisions to be taken by staff with no professional legal qualifications. In 1998-99, the average unit cost of resolving a case was £245, compared to an average unit cost of £300 (at 1998-99 prices) under the previous scheme between 1993-94 and 1995-96 (Figure 34).

Unit administration costs per case resolved, 1993-94 to 1998-99 (1998-99 prices)

Figure 34

Unit costs for resolving applications fell by about one-fifth between 1993-94 and 1998-99.



Source: National Audit Office analysis of cost and case resolution data supplied by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel and the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Note: 1. The high unit costs for the tariff based scheme in 1996-97 reflected the set up costs of the scheme's first year of operation, and the fact that at the year end many first decisions were 'on offer' to applicants, and were thus unresolved.

5.7 During 1998-99, the Authority paid £114 million in compensation to applicants under the tariff-based scheme. The associated administrative costs (excluding the costs of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board), at £16 million, were the equivalent of 12 per cent of its total expenditure. Administration costs as a proportion of total expenditure were proportionately lower for the previous scheme, averaging 10 per cent of total expenditure between 1993-94 to 1995-96, reflecting the higher average level of compensation awards.

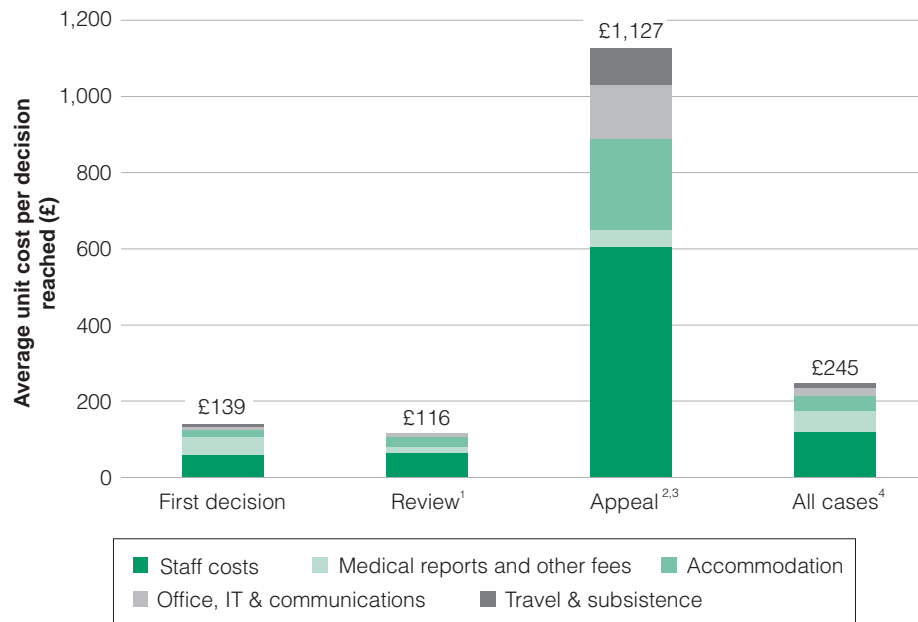
Unit administrative costs by processing stage

5.8 Average unit administration costs vary widely between decision stages for the tariff-based compensation scheme. At the first decision stage, at which the greatest number of cases is resolved, administration costs in 1998-99 averaged £139 per decision. The average cost at review was £116 per review decision, and the average cost of an appeal was to £1,127. The average cumulative cost of an appeal, including first decision and review, was £1,382 (Figure 35).

Composition of average unit administrative costs by processing stage for cases resolved in 1998-99

Figure 35

Average unit administrative costs vary widely between processing stages, ranging from £116 per review decision to £1,127 at appeal.



Source: National Audit Office analysis of Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority and Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel management information

- Notes: 1. Cost for review stage only, excluding the cost of earlier first decisions.
 2. Cost for appeal stage only, excluding the cost of earlier first decisions and reviews.
 3. Appeal stage costs comprised £354 spent within the Authority's Presenting Officers Unit and £773 spent by the Appeals Panel.
 4. The average for a case typical of the 1998-99 workload mix.

5.9 Half of the administration costs are staff-related. The remainder is spent on accommodation, office services and communications, and the fees paid by the Authority to obtain medical and similar reports (Figure 35). During 1998-99, the Authority spent a total of more than £4 million on medical and similar reports, representing 23 per cent of all administrative costs.

5.10 Unit administration costs are significantly lower at first decision stage under the tariff-based scheme compared to average cost of £221 (1998-99 prices) under the previous scheme. However, at the appeal stage costs appear to have been much lower under the previous scheme, at £420 in 1995-96 at 1998-99 prices. Appeals under the tariff-based scheme involve work by the Authority's Presenting Officers Unit to prepare appeal cases for consideration by the Appeals Panel, and the deliberations of the Panel itself (Figure 32). There are a number of reasons why recorded costs at appeal are higher than under the preceding scheme:

- The appeals workload was more than three times greater in 1995-96 than in 1998-99, with consequent economies of scale.

- The composition of appeal costs under the tariff-based scheme is not comparable with the equivalent costs under the previous scheme. With the establishment of an Appeals Panel, independent from the administration of the Scheme by the Authority, the Panel now bears all its own administrative costs and overheads such as audit, recruitment and information technology.
- Whereas the Board often held the previous appeals in courts, which were provided free or at low cost, the Panel has had to hire venues, including hotel facilities, because court accommodation is being used more intensively. The Panel has frequently also been unable to book the accommodation of other tribunals, which would be cheaper and more suitable.

Achievement of processing targets

5.11 The Home Office, in consultation with the Authority, sets targets for the achievement of annual reductions in the average unit cost of resolving applications. These targets relate to all applications, both under the tariff-based and former schemes. They have required annual efficiency improvements of between seven and ten per cent in real terms, reflecting the increasing proportion of the caseload under the current, more straightforward scheme. The targets were achieved between 1996-97 and 1997-98, and in 1998-99 performance fell just outside the target (Figure 36).

Performance against cost targets, 1996-97 to 1998-99

Figure 36

The Authority achieved its cost targets in 1996-97 and 1997-98, and came close to its target in 1998-99.



Source: National Audit Office analysis of Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority annual reports and business plans

Note: Unit costs exclude the Appeals Panel and are at 1998-99 prices. These targets relate to all applications, both under the tariff-based and former schemes.

5.12 Since 1996, the Appeals Panel has had an annual target of resolving an average of eight appeals each hearing day. The Panel fell some way short of the target in 1996-97 and 1997-98, resolving respectively an average of 6.1 and 5.7 appeals each hearing day. In 1998-99, the Panel came closer to meeting the target by resolving an average of 7.7 appeals each hearing day.

5.13 The under-performance in 1996-97 and 1997-98 arose principally because a smaller than expected number of cases was available for appeal hearings. In 1996-97, the Panel had planned for 3,500 appeals, but received only 656, more than half of which reached it in the final quarter. During 1997-98, only 185 appeals a month were received in the first three quarters of the year. The Panel had to aim to meet its target to resolve 80 per cent of appeals within six months, and the Panel therefore operated its hearings, which take place at different locations around the country, with less than the potential workload of eight to ten cases that can be heard in a day.

5.14 Workload volumes rose during 1998-99 to an average of 535 appeals received each month. The main reason why the hearings per day still fell slightly short of the target of eight arose from a higher than expected level of adjournments. We analysed 49 appeal cases scheduled for an oral hearing between February and April 1999 and found that nine (18 per cent) were

adjourned before the hearing. In two cases there was more than one adjournment. Six of the adjournments had been requested by the applicant; in one case, a police witness was unable to attend; the other two adjournments were at the request of the Authority’s Presenting Officers Unit, one because the Unit had been unable to obtain all the papers needed for the hearing; in the other case, no reason was given. The Unit and the Appeals Panel have been taking action to ensure better use of appeals hearings by making it clearer to applicants that adjournments will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances, and by increasing the number of cases listed for each hearing.

5.15 The Authority’s and Appeals Panel’s other targets relate to the volume of cases to be resolved. They impact upon efficiency in as much as they are set within the framework of agreed staff complements and cost budgets. During 1997-98 and 1998-99, the Authority achieved its targets (Figure 37).

Figure 37

Performance against targets for case resolutions, 1996-97 to 1998-99

The Authority achieved its targets for case resolutions in 1997-98 and 1998-99. The Appeals Panel has not yet met its target for resolving appeals.

	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99	
	Target	Outturn	Target	Outturn	Target	Outturn
Authority ¹	18,300	13,566 ²	55,200	56,389	71,500	71,800
Appeals Panel	1,700	146 ²	1,500	1,439	6,500	3,059

Notes: 1. Figures for the Authority exclude cases resolved by the Appeals Panel at appeal.

2. This was the first year of the scheme. The Appeals Panel received only 656 appeal cases in 1996-97. More than half were received in the last quarter, giving the Appeals Panel insufficient time to arrange hearings.

Source: Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority and Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel Annual Reports

5.16 The Appeals Panel came close to its target in 1997-98, but achieved less than half its target in 1998-99 (Figure 37). The shortfall accounts in large measure for the very high costs of appeal cases in 1998-99 (Figure 35).

5.17 The Appeals Panel’s low workload and high costs resulted from the need to wait for appeals to be prepared by the Presenting Officers Unit. The Panel’s efficiency is thus dependent upon the Unit being resourced to prepare appeals at an appropriate rate. In Part 4 of this report we described the build-up of appeals work in the Authority’s Presenting Officers Unit, whose initial complement had to be set without experience of appeals under the new scheme. The Authority has recently responded by increasing the number of the Unit’s staff (paragraph 4.34).

The Authority's Glasgow and London offices

5.18 We noted in paragraph 4.6 that the Authority's Glasgow office processes applications more quickly than the London office. The Glasgow office, which processes three-quarters of all applications, also has lower unit administration costs and higher levels of productivity. In 1998-99, the unit administration cost of reaching a first decision was 40 per cent higher in London than in Glasgow, while productivity, expressed in terms of decisions per caseworker, was 26 per cent lower (Figure 38). At review stage, unit administration costs were 19 per cent higher in London, but the London office's productivity rate was marginally higher than Glasgow.

Productivity and unit administration costs in the Authority's Glasgow and London offices, 1998-99

Figure 38

The Authority's Glasgow office achieves significantly higher levels of productivity at first decision stage than the London office.

	Glasgow	London
Average administrative unit costs (£) for:		
First decisions	127	178
Review decisions	110	131
Productivity		
First decisions per caseworker	430	315
Review decisions per reviewer	360	375

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority management information

Note: Differentials were broadly similar in 1996-97 and 1997-98.

5.19 Two-thirds of the differential in unit administration costs at first decision is explained by the London weighting of salaries and higher accommodation costs in London. The remaining third is explained by differences in productivity. The Authority's staff and managers considered that the Glasgow office achieved higher productivity because its workforce is more settled and experienced. In London the rate of staff turnover is higher and the London office generally employs a higher proportion of agency staff. In July 1999, 64 per cent of the Glasgow workforce had at least one year's experience, whereas in London the proportion was 36 per cent. Reflecting these differences, the Authority sets higher performance targets for Glasgow's caseworker and decision teams. The Authority has recently begun a benchmarking study between its London and Glasgow offices, to assess whether there are elements of the offices' working practices which might usefully be adopted by the other.

Improving processing efficiency

5.20 Though the Authority's systems and procedures were found to be comparable to those operated by the three private sector insurance companies, our consultants identified practices in the companies which could be adopted by the Authority to improve processing efficiency, particularly in the following areas:

- reducing the numbers of ineligible applications;
- initial assessment of applications and allocation to different processing routes; and
- cases that decision-makers return to caseworkers for further work.

Reducing the numbers of ineligible applications

5.21 Since 1964-65, the first year of the (former) Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme, the proportion of applications refused an award has steadily increased from 6 per cent to around 50 per cent in 1998-99. Such applications take up administrative time that could otherwise be spent on dealing with eligible cases.

5.22 Time is also taken up in dealing with incomplete application forms. During 1998-99, the Authority sent more than 50,000 questionnaires to applicants to obtain information that had been omitted from their application forms.

5.23 In Part 2 of this report (paragraphs 2.2 to 2.7), we identified areas in which the scheme's application form and guidance to applicants could be improved to give clearer information to applicants. There needs to be a particular emphasis on circumstances and types of applications which would not be eligible, through, for example, re-design of the form, ensuring that applicants are clear about what information is required. Our consultants agreed that the Authority's material could be improved in this way.

5.24 Our survey indicated that almost 50 per cent of applicants had not seen the Authority's guidance. The insurance industry also finds that people commonly make a claim without taking account of the requirements of their insurance cover. To help overcome this, and to provide a service which many customers prefer, many companies now handle new applications through telephone call centres. The main purposes of the call centres are to provide customers with readily accessible advice about their claim, partly with a view to dissuading callers from

submitting claims which are clearly ineligible, and helping callers to ensure they submit a complete and fully supported claim. Figure 39 indicates how a call centre run by the Authority might operate.

How a call centre might be used for applications under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Figure 39



General advice leaflets to crime victims would include the phone number of the Authority's call centre. They would also give basic advice on eligibility under the scheme to help discourage calls from applicants who are clearly ineligible.



Crime victim phones the call centre and is asked a series of questions about the incident designed to make a provisional assessment of eligibility. In some cases, the applicant will not wish to provide details over the phone and the call centre operator would ensure that the option of a postal application was explained early on in the call. The call centre operator discusses eligibility and the reasons with the caller. Where the case appeared to be ineligible, the operator would still need to be clear with the caller that it was up to them whether or not to apply.



For callers who may be eligible for a compensation award, the operator may complete an application form on computer with as many details as the caller is able to provide. The operator advises the caller what further information will be necessary for the application to be considered.



The completed or part-completed application form is sent to the applicant for further completion and/or signature. When the applicant returns the form it is checked to ensure that the full information has been provided and approved as complete and ready for further processing.

Source: National Audit Office

5.25 Most companies using a call centre also use it to handle simple enquiries of customers about outstanding claims. If the Authority were to adopt the call centre approach, simple enquiries could be dealt with by the call centre operator, while more detailed enquiries could be directed to the appropriate caseworker with knowledge of the application. This and other aspects of a call centre entail flexible use of information technology, for example to enable the operator to call up case details quickly on a computer. Should it decide to establish a call centre, the Authority would need to take expert advice on the requirements which, if

established in-house, would include technology upgrading and additional training of some of the Authority's staff. The Authority sees improved customer service as the call centre's most important potential benefit, and a centre would also contribute to meeting the Government's wider objective of increasing the amount of public business which is handled electronically (*Modernising Government*, Cm 4310, March 1999).

5.26 The potential benefits from reducing the number of ineligible applications, for example through improving the scheme's application form and guidance and the use of a call centre, are difficult to quantify. As an illustration, even if the Authority were to screen out only some of the simpler cases that are least likely to go beyond the first decision, a 10 per cent reduction in applications would release additional staff effort worth almost £0.5 million a year.

5.27 One insurance company comparator was using electronic scanning to input data from claims. The Authority might consider introducing this technology to speed the input of applications. It might, however, be less relevant where call centre operators were already managing to complete large sections of the applications using information provided by applicants on the telephone.

Initial assessment of applications and allocation to different processing routes

5.28 The Authority undertakes little initial screening of applications to assess their complexity before allocating them to a caseworker. The Authority's initial action group's role is limited to flagging certain applications for priority action, for example those involving victims aged 65 years and over or with life-threatening injuries, and fatality cases. The group also passes applications it considers to fail the scheme's eligibility criteria straight to decision-makers. Most other cases are allocated to a caseworking section and from there to a caseworker, once police and medical reports have been received. Selective allocation of the more complex cases to experienced staff is limited involving, for example, cases of complex calculations for loss of earnings.

5.29 In contrast, the insurance company comparators screened cases so that they could be allocated to staff with the level of skills and experience required for each case, thus ensuring efficient processing and best use of staff resources. Their experience suggests that there is scope for much more differentiation between applications for criminal injuries compensation before they are allocated to a member of staff for processing. It might, for example, be possible to identify types of application which are typically straightforward and allocate them to an

experienced caseworker for the decision, rather than to a more senior “decision-maker”. Were such decisions to be taken by a single person, the Authority would need to introduce controls such as a random check on a proportion of cases, to minimise the risk of fraud. At the same time, some types of case may typically be complex and difficult to resolve. These might be more effectively dealt with by referring them to the most experienced decision-makers. More experienced staff might also identify and take responsibility for first decisions which are taking a long time, and which they may be best placed to resolve quickly.

5.30 In setting the criteria for allocating cases according to their complexity, the Authority would need to analyse applications to establish whether any patterns exist and identify the types of case which often:

- fail at first decision but succeed at review;
- fail at first decision and review but succeed at appeal; and
- fail at each stage, apparently because the applicant was not persuaded to drop an ineligible case.

5.31 Each of these types of cases might best be allocated to different processes. For example, in a difficult case with a relatively high risk of a first decision being changed at review, it might be more efficient and effective to fast-track the case for an experienced decision maker’s opinion at the outset.

5.32 Our analysis of samples of review and appeals cases and discussions with victims’ representatives indicated that some types of case can be particularly difficult to resolve, and that these often involve differences of view over documentary police or medical evidence including:

- uncertainty over evidence, for example an alleged rape in which the assailant was not apprehended;
- concerns that the applicant had not co-operated sufficiently with the police; and/or
- psychological trauma.

5.33 These cases might be resolved earlier if the Authority could be more open in the stages before appeal about the medical or police evidence on which it is relying. Alternatively, where such cases are contested at first decision, they might more beneficially be fast-tracked to appeal rather than undergo the paper review, since the appeal will allow the evidence at issue to be discussed at a hearing. Fast tracking to appeal in this way would involve a legislative change to the current scheme. Each case would also need to be carefully considered, and the applicant permitted to retain the review stage if preferred, not least because an applicant in a sensitive case may be reluctant to undergo an oral hearing.

Cases returned to the caseworker for further work

5.34 During 1998-99, more than a quarter of the cases submitted to decision-makers for first decision were returned to the caseworkers for further consideration or further information, though this includes some cases in which the caseworker is simply requesting advice from the decision maker. The Authority's caseworkers suggested several other reasons for case returns. Differences between the levels of information required by different decision makers caused difficulty when caseworkers worked for a new decision maker, and caseworkers considered that pressures to meet targets meant that some caseworkers submitted cases before they were themselves fully satisfied.

5.35 These kinds of difficulties might be alleviated by moving to a more team-based arrangement. The team would have its own targets, including quality targets using the results of quality assurance. In working to meet the team's targets, it would be in every team member's interest, particularly the team leader's, to share knowledge and experience, to develop a shared understanding of what is required, and to provide effective feedback to staff on their work. Where a team is successful in creating a supportive environment for its members, the need for "returns" of files to caseworkers should be reduced. Developing this model would link effectively to the Authority's work to retain Investors in People accreditation (paragraph 3.9).

Recommendations

23. The Authority should pilot alternatives for streamlining the processing of applications.
 - There is scope for greater screening of applications with a view to allocating them to the staff with the most appropriate level of experience.

- Different processing routes should be considered for types of applications that typically go right through to appeal before being resolved, designed to provide a comprehensive assessment of the case much earlier.
- Alternative working arrangements involving greater team working should be tested.
- The option of a telephone call centre to handle applications and provide advice should be explored.

Appendix 1

Study methodology

Surveys

- 1** We carried out three surveys:
 - A questionnaire survey of all applicants whose cases were resolved in May 1999 (Appendix 2).
 - A questionnaire survey of all the police forces in England, Scotland and Wales (Appendix 3).
 - A survey, included in the May 1999 Bulletin of the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers, which asked law firms representing applicants for criminal injuries compensation for views on:
 - The level of awareness among victims of the Authority's compensation scheme
 - How easy the scheme is to understand
 - The speed of the Authority's decision-making
 - The consistency and equity of decisions made
 - The Authority's communication with applicants and their representatives
 - Reviews and Appeals.

We received fifteen full responses and two general responses from law firms.

Performance and process benchmarking

2 We employed the management consultants *Vantagepoint* to evaluate whether there is scope to improve the efficiency with which the Authority processes applications. The Authority considered that insurance companies involved in processing personal injury cases were appropriate comparators, so a benchmarking exercise was undertaken between the Authority and three insurance companies – CGU, Iron Trades and Norwich Union. The benchmarking involved:

- documenting arrangements for processing applications at each organisation, including administrative procedures and staffing;
- analysing and comparing processing methods, identifying best practice and the scope for improving the Authority's efficiency and quantifying potential savings;
- quantifying productivity; and
- discussing and agreeing the key findings with the organisations concerned.

Focus groups

3 We commissioned *Market and Opinion Research International (MORI)* to carry out focus group research among staff working with the tariff-based Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme. The study investigated four main areas:

- The scope for improving the quality of service to applicants and the consistency with which applications are handled.
- The scope for improving the speed and quality of information provided by the police and medical authorities.
- Whether changes in staffing and administrative procedures might be required to reduce delays in progressing applications.
- The types of applications which cause staff the greatest difficulty to resolve, the extent of the problems caused and potential solutions.

4 A total of thirty staff attended four focus groups, two held in Glasgow and two in London. One group at each location comprised decision makers and one group caseworkers.

5 A topic guide was used at the focus group session to ensure a consistent approach. The guide covered a number of workplace issues: staffing, decision-making, training, communication, working relationships (internal and external) and computer equipment.

Case file analysis

6 We examined a sample of 198 applications received in May 1998. The cases were selected randomly on an interval basis and our checks showed that the sample was broadly representative. Using this sample we assessed:

- the age and gender profile of applicants;
- the speed and consistency of case handling; and
- the extent of information evaluated in reaching decisions.

7 The case files represented each of the stages in the resolution of a case.

- A sample of 98 first decisions randomly selected from approximately 1,400 cases opened during the week commencing 11 May 1998.
- A sample of 50 review decisions randomly selected from approximately 3,600 cases resolved in February, March and April 1999.
- A sample of 50 appeal decisions randomly selected from approximately 900 appeals held at hearings in February, March and April 1999. In addition, we looked at 10 cases which were settled before a single adjudicator and five which were settled by the Chairman.

Management information and other data sources

8 We reviewed and analysed the Authority and Appeal Panel's published and unpublished management information on costs, performance and activity levels. This was supported by structured interviews of key staff members.

9 In addition, we analysed applications by police force area to assess the extent to which the distribution of cases was in proportion to each area's population and level of violent crime. The sources of the data used were: the Authority, the Home Office and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, the Scottish Executive, and the Government Statistical Service.

Liaison with other bodies

10 We contacted a number of external organisations to ask their views of the Authority's performance:

- The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, and Victim Support (England, Wales and Northern Ireland).
- The Law Society, the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers and the Free Representation Unit.
- The British Medical Association and the National Health Service Executive.
- The Police Federation of England and Wales, the Association of Chief Police Officers, and the Prison Officers' Association.
- The Trades Union Congress, UNISON, the National Union of Teachers (England and Wales), the Royal College of Nursing and the Union of Shop Distributive and Allied Workers.

Appendix 2

Survey of applicants for criminal injuries compensation

Purpose of survey

- 1** The survey was designed to obtain information about:
 - applicants' awareness of the scheme and the ease of application;
 - the extent and quality of communication from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority and the Appeals Panel;
 - applicants' satisfaction with the time taken to resolve their applications and for each stage of the process; and
 - applicants' satisfaction with the Authority's and the Panel's handling of their applications.

Survey methodology

- 2** The format of the survey and the questions were agreed with the Authority and the Appeals Panel. For reasons of client confidentiality, the survey was sent out via the Authority in July 1999 to the 5,970 applicants whose applications were resolved by the Authority or Panel in May 1999. This month, which was not unusual in terms of case mix, was selected since applicants' responses would be fresh. Questionnaires were returned by respondents in a confidential format to an independent firm *Independent Data Analysis Limited*, who input details from the questionnaires onto a database, which we then analysed.

Response rate

- 3** Responses were received from 1,407, or 24 per cent, of the 5,970 applicants, a slightly higher response rate than had been anticipated. It gives a precision of +/- 4 per cent to the findings from the cases which involved working at first decision, +/- 6 per cent to findings from cases which went to review, and +/- 10 per cent to findings from cases which went to appeal.

4 Figures 2.1 and 2.2 set out response rates by processing stages. There was an element of ‘under-response’ for cases that had been through the review stage. The most significant ‘under response’ was from applicants who did not receive an award, and our analysis showed significant differences between the answers given by this group. Consequently, we have separately presented findings for this group, and have corrected for response bias by re-weighting, where the responses from all applicants are combined.

Figure 2.1**Survey population and respondents**

The survey was drawn from a typical month for case resolutions, but responses were received to a greater extent from applicants who had received awards than from unsuccessful applicants

Applications resolved at	Context: 1998-99 data	Survey population (May 1999)	Respondents to survey
First decision	79 per cent	79 per cent	82 per cent
Review	17 per cent	16 per cent	12 per cent
Appeal	4 per cent	5 per cent	6 per cent
Total number of cases	74,859	5,970	1,407
Per cent of cases in which awards made	54 per cent	50 per cent	72 per cent
	<i>First decision: 58%</i>	<i>First decision: 51%</i>	<i>First decision: 76%</i>
	<i>Review: 40%</i>	<i>Review: 43%</i>	<i>Review: 52%</i>
	<i>Appeal: 37%</i>	<i>Appeal: 51%</i>	<i>Appeal: 40%</i>

Sources: Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority management information and National Audit Office survey

Response rates

Figure 2.2

Applicants who received awards were 2.5 times as likely to respond to our survey than those who did not receive awards.

	Stage at which case finally resolved ¹			
	First Decision	Review	Appeal	All cases
Numbers				
With award	883	86	32	1001
Without award	280	78	48	406
All cases	1163	164	80	1407
Per cent response²				
With award	36.7	20.2	21.9	33.7
Without award	12.2	13.7	34.5	13.6
All cases	24.8	16.5	28.1	23.6

Notes: 1. Applicants whose cases went to review or appeal will also have experienced the prior stage(s). Consequently, we have evidence for applicants' views on the review stage for 244 cases (164 + 80) and on the first decision stage for 1,407 cases (1,163 + 164 + 80). Our re-weighting was based on response rates for cases *resolved* at each stage.

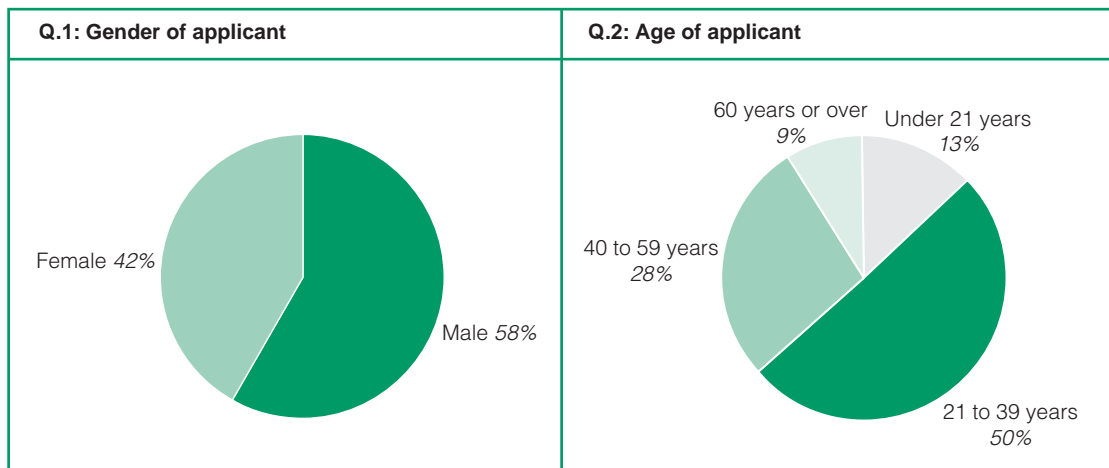
2. The response rate compares the number of respondents with the total population for each category in May 1999. Our re-weighting involved equalising the response rates for award and non-award cases through multiplying responses by the formula response rate for all cases divided by the response rate for awards (or non-awards).

Source: National Audit Office survey

Survey results

5 Figure 2.3 shows the gender and age breakdowns of respondents to our survey. These did not materially differ between those applicants who received an award and those who were unsuccessful. The applications related mainly (86 per cent) to personal injury, with 9 per cent for fatal injuries, and just over 2 per cent each for loss of earnings and special expenses.

Figure 2.3 Gender and age profile of respondents



6 Figure 2.4 shows respondents' views on the Authority's guidance and application forms.

Question (total number of responses)	Percentage response from applicants who		Re-weighted average response
	Received award	Did not receive award	
Did you see a copy of the Authority's guide for applicants? (1,407)			
Yes	59	40	49
No	38	58	48
Not answered	3	2	3
How helpful was this guidance when making your application? (751)			
Very helpful	49	23	36
Fairly helpful	44	62	53
Fairly unhelpful	2	6	4
Very unhelpful	1	4	3
Not answered	4	5	4
How easy did you find it to understand and complete the application form(s)? (1,407)			
Very easy	29	18	23
Fairly easy	57	55	56
Fairly difficult	6	13	9
Very difficult	2	5	3
Not answered	6	9	8
Did you seek professional advice or assistance before submitting the application form, and if so from whom? (1,407)			
From Victim Support	24	16	20
From a solicitor	24	36	30
From a Citizens Advice Bureau	2	2	2
From a trade union/professional body	5	5	5
Other	3	2	3
Did not seek professional advice	39	34	36
Not answered	3	5	4

7 A fifth of applicants told us that they currently had the use of a home computer for internet access; while two-fifths of all respondents told us that they would have used the internet to make their application for compensation if this service had been available.

8 Figure 2.5 shows respondents' views on the assessment of applications at first decision.

Figure 2.5**Respondents' views on assessment of applications at first decision**

Question (total number of responses)	Percentage response from applicants who		Re-weighted average response
	Received award	Did not receive award	
<i>Did the Authority ask you for further information after you submitted your application form? (1,407)</i>			
Yes	60	50	55
No	38	48	43
Not answered	2	2	2
<i>If yes, how clear was it to you what you were being asked for? (804)</i>			
Very clear	64	38	51
Fairly clear	26	37	32
Fairly unclear	2	9	6
Very unclear	2	9	5
Not answered	6	7	6
<i>Did you have any reason to contact the Authority whilst awaiting a decision? (1,407)</i>			
Yes	33	25	29
No	65	71	68
Not answered	2	4	3
<i>If yes, did you contact the Authority..?(431)</i>			
By telephone	56	53	55
In writing	11	17	14
Both by telephone and in writing	26	22	24
Not answered	7	8	7
<i>How satisfied were you with the way the Authority's staff deal with your enquiry/enquiries? (890)</i>			
Very satisfied	42	7	26
Fairly satisfied	44	38	41
Fairly dissatisfied	8	16	12
Very dissatisfied	6	39	21
<i>How satisfied were you with the time taken by the Authority to make its decision on your claim? (1,407)</i>			
Very satisfied	26	3	15
Fairly satisfied	49	42	45
Fairly dissatisfied	15	22	19
Very dissatisfied	9	29	19
Not answered	1	4	2

continued...

Figure 2.5

Respondents' views on assessment of applications at first decision *continued*

Question (total number of responses)	Percentage response from applicants who		Re-weighted average response
	Received award	Did not receive award	
<i>How well do you feel the Authority explained the reasons for its decision on your claim ? (1,407)</i>			
Very well	32	4	18
Satisfactorily	52	25	38
Fairly poorly	8	20	14
Very poorly	6	44	25
Not answered	2	7	5
<i>What was your response to the Authority's decision on your claim ? (1,407)</i>			
Regarded the decision as fair, and accepted it	70	9	40
Regarded the decision as unfair, and applied for a review	12	31	21
Regarded the decision as unfair, but decided not to apply for a review	15	49	32
Not answered	3	11	7

9 Figure 2.6 shows respondents' views on the assessment of applications at review.

Figure 2.6**Respondents' views on assessment of applications at the review stage**

Question (total number of responses)	Percentage response from applicants who		Re-weighted average response
	Received award	Did not receive award	
As a result of the review, did the initial decision .. ? (244)			
Change in your favour	58	-	26
Stay the same	15	31	24
Change to your disadvantage	22	45	35
Not answered	5	23	15
How satisfied were you with the time taken by the Authority to undertake the review? (244)			
Very satisfied	6	2	3
Fairly satisfied	53	37	44
Fairly dissatisfied	24	21	22
Very dissatisfied	14	22	19
Not answered	3	18	12
How well did the Authority explained the reasons for the outcome of the review ? (244)			
Very well	10	2	6
Satisfactorily	52	29	39
Fairly poorly	11	21	17
Very poorly	22	28	25
Not answered	5	20	13
What was your response to the outcome of the review ? (244)			
Regarded the decision as fair, and accepted it	39	3	19
Regarded the decision as unfair, and appealed to the Appeals Panel	27	38	33
Regarded the decision as unfair, but decided not to appeal	29	37	33
Not answered	5	22	15

10 Figure 2.7 shows respondents' views on the assessment of appeals.

Question (total number of responses)	Percentage response from applicants who		Re-weighted average response
	Received award	Did not receive award	
As a result of your appeal, did the decision .. ? (80)			
Change in your favour	72	-	37
Stay the same	13	31	22
Change to your disadvantage	6	44	24
Not answered	9	25	17
How satisfied were you with the time taken by the Appeals Panel to determine your appeal ? (80)			
Very satisfied	16	2	9
Fairly satisfied	59	38	49
Fairly dissatisfied	6	10	8
Very dissatisfied	13	31	22
Not answered	6	19	12
How well did the Appeals Panel explain its decision on your appeal ? (80)			
Very well	41	4	23
Satisfactorily	31	27	29
Fairly poorly	6	15	10
Very poorly	13	31	22
Not answered	9	23	16
Were you represented at the appeal hearing, and if so by whom ? (80)			
Not represented	41	52	46
Represented by barrister/solicitor	41	17	29
Represented by Victim Support	3	4	4
Represented by trade union/professional body	3	0	2
Represented by friend/relative	0	2	1
Not answered	12	25	18
Overall, how satisfied were you with the Appeal Panel's handling of your appeal ? (80)			
Very satisfied	41	2	22
Fairly satisfied	28	13	20
Fairly dissatisfied	9	12	11
Very dissatisfied	9	50	29
Not answered	13	23	18

11 Figure 2.8 shows respondents' views overall.

Figure 2.8 Respondents' overall views on the Authority's and Appeals Panel's assessment of their application

Question (total number of responses)	Percentage response from applicants who		Re-weighted average response
	Received award	Did not receive award	
<i>If you received compensation, was the amount .. ? (1001)</i>			
Less than you expected	33	Not applicable	Not applicable
About the amount you expected	47		
More than you expected	15		
Not answered	5		
<i>Overall, how would you rate the time taken to fully resolve your claim ? (1407)</i>			
Much quicker than you expected	13	4	8
Quicker than you expected	14	4	9
About what you expected	30	24	27
Slightly longer than you expected	21	14	17
Much longer than you expected	21	26	24
Not answered	1	28	15
<i>Overall, how would you rate the handling of your claim by the Authority and Appeals Panel ? (1407)</i>			
Very good	28	1	14
Good	21	6	13
Satisfactory	34	21	28
Fairly poor	7	17	12
Very poor	5	33	19
Not answered	5	22	14
<i>Did you have reason to use the Authority's complaints procedure ? (1407)</i>			
Yes	2	4	3
No	85	44	65
Not aware of complaints	10	33	21
Not answered	3	19	11
<i>If yes, were you satisfied that your complaint was adequately, impartially and promptly investigated ? (41)</i>			
Yes	29	41	35
No	21	35	28
Not answered	50	24	37

Appendix 3

Questionnaire survey of police forces

Introduction

1 We surveyed all 51 police forces in England, Scotland and Wales. The questionnaire focused on the information requests sent by the Authority to support its resolution of applications for criminal injuries compensation.

2 The level of response was high: 49 out of the 51 police forces responded, giving a response rate of 96 per cent. Of the 39 English forces, 38 responded (97 per cent); of the 8 Scottish forces, 7 responded (88 per cent); and of the Welsh forces, all 4 responded.

Question 1: How do you deal with initial and follow-up information requests from the Authority?

Information requests from the Authority are dealt with by ...	Forces (per cent)
... the <i>officer</i> responsible for the case	14 (29%)
... a member of staff on a <i>full-time</i> basis	14 (29%)
... a member of staff on a <i>part-time</i> basis	15 (30%)
... a <i>number</i> of staff	6 (12%)

3 Police forces deal with information requests from the Authority in a number of ways, with no one approach being the norm (see table above). Requests tend to be handled by either the officer responsible for the case or by support staff. The approach adopted depends on the structure of the force and the resources available to it, so that in larger forces area teams will often handle requests, while in smaller forces they will form one of a number of duties for support staff. Forces noted in their response that information can be retrieved from a number of sources; in some cases from both the centre and an area team and in others from support staff and from officers. One force's practice was for only more serious requests to be referred to the officer responsible for the case.

Question 2: Do you set internal targets for responding to requests for information from the Authority?

	Forces (per cent)	
Internal targets <i>are</i> set	26	(53%)
Internal targets are <i>not</i> set	23	(47%)

Internal targets <i>are</i> set of ...	Forces (per cent)	
... 2 weeks	15	(58%)
... 3 weeks	4	(15%)
... 4 weeks	7	(27%)

Question 3: Are the standard forms used by the Authority to request information adequate?

4 25 forces, 51 per cent of those responding, stated that the forms are adequate. Some forces raised concerns about:

- insufficient detail provided for some cases; forces would find it helpful if standard details could be provided for all cases, for example a crime or police reference, the place of birth of the applicant, the address of the applicant and the location of the offence;
- inaccurate information provided for some cases, mainly because the applicant has supplied inaccurate information to the Authority; and
- lack of space within the standard form to record other relevant information.

Question 4: Do you consider that the Authority acts on the information you provide?

	Forces (per cent)	
<i>Always</i> - no or virtually no unnecessary reminders sent	7	(14%)
<i>Mainly</i> - a few unnecessary reminders sent	21	(43%)
<i>Sometimes</i> - several unnecessary reminders sent	12	(25%)
<i>Rarely</i> - many unnecessary reminders sent	1	(2%)
<i>Never</i> - unnecessary reminders sent in all or virtually all cases	-	
Don't know	8	(16%)

5 Forces felt that the duplication of effort caused by unnecessary reminders wasted time for the force and the Authority. Forces felt that duplication would be reduced and closer co-ordination established if they had a named contact at the Authority.

Question 5: Would it (a) be feasible now and (b) be desirable in the future for your force to use CD-ROM, diskette, Internet or e-mail to provide information to the Authority?

Feasible now?	Forces (per cent)		
	Yes	No	Don't know
CD-ROM	10 (21%)	34 (69%)	5 (10%)
Diskette	17 (35%)	26 (53%)	6 (12%)
Internet	6 (12%)	36 (74%)	7 (14%)
E-mail	14 (29%)	31 (63%)	4 (8%)

6 A majority of forces do not have the IT capability to provide information to the Authority via CD-ROM, diskette, internet or e-mail. However, they felt it would be desirable to use e-mail to improve communication with the Authority, though the security of information transferred electronically would have to be addressed.

Desirable in the future?	Forces (per cent)		
	Yes	No	Don't know
CD-ROM	15 (31%)	24 (49%)	10 (20%)
Diskette	17 (35%)	20 (41%)	12 (24%)
Internet	14 (29%)	23 (47%)	12 (24%)
E-mail	29 (59%)	13 (27%)	7 (14%)

Question 6: Do you have any other suggestions for improving the Authority's dealings with your force?

- Use the correct address when sending information requests; too often the request is either sent to the wrong part of a particular force or the wrong force altogether.
- Quote crime references in follow-up correspondence; forces acknowledge that the Authority cannot always quote a crime reference in its initial correspondence, but would find it helpful if it did so in follow-up correspondence once the Authority had received the reference from the force.
- Improve communication with forces, whether through a telephone contact for each force at the Authority, or via e-mail.
- Liaise more closely with the Crown Prosecution Service, who are in a position to provide more accurate details of when cases are due to come to court and what stage any court appeal has reached.