



# ‘What is your view?’

*Reflections on the citizen and government*

Summary - 2010 annual report  
of the National Ombudsman of the Netherlands

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## Preface

This report by the National Ombudsman is all about reflection. The thematic section, entitled *'What is your view?' Reflections on the citizen and government*, considers the importance of reflection and feedback in maintaining amicable relations between the authorities and the individual citizen. For government bodies and officials, it is always instructive to be asked 'How would you like to be treated if you were in this situation?' The answers to this question say a lot about the way government relates to the public. The work of the National Ombudsman shows that such reflection and feedback are effective in many situations. When developing policy and organising its implementation, government can learn many lessons from the way individuals, businesses and institutions 'feel about it'.

The basis of the National Ombudsman's job is dealing with complaints about government from individuals, businesses and institutions. In 2010, he received almost 14,000 complaints and 31,000 telephone calls. It is important that complaints are taken seriously and that adequate measures are taken in response to them. The day-to-day work of the National Ombudsman provides a good starting point for reflection on the way government operates and the way individuals, businesses and institutions operate in relation to government. The National Ombudsman has various ways of communicating his findings and insights to government and, by doing so, helps to improve relations between government and the public. Reflection and feedback are key factors in the work of the National Ombudsman – and that also means reflecting on his own performance.

This is why the director of the National Ombudsman's Office recently commissioned the Verwey-Jonker Institute to conduct an independent study reflecting on the National Ombudsman and his office.<sup>1)</sup> The study, published in 2010, looks back at the present Ombudsman's first five years in office but also forward to the future. It shows that government bodies that have dealings with the National Ombudsman regard him as a necessary watchdog and counterweight, giving the individual citizen a voice and forcing government to engage in constant quality improvement. The National Ombudsman is now better known as an institution and has lent complaint handling a new dimension by translating the principle of fair treatment into day-to-day practice and by operating in a solutions-oriented way. Following the study, the House of Representatives voted by a large majority to re-appoint the present National Ombudsman for another six-year term, commencing on 1 October 2011.

Finally, 2010 also saw two new developments affecting the work of the National Ombudsman.

**Ombudsman for Children** Parliament voted to create a special Ombudsman for Children, to operate from within the National Ombudsman's Office. This is an important development in the protection of children's rights in the Netherlands. The Ombudsman for Children will provide a vital complement to the work of major players in the children's rights field, such as UNICEF and Defence for Children. The new Ombudsman for Children will start work in the spring of 2011.

**Dutch Caribbean** On 10 October 2010, the islands of Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba became public bodies of the Netherlands, with a new status comparable to that of municipalities in the Netherlands in Europe. Since that date, therefore, Chapter 9 of the General Administrative Law Act has applied to the islands and their central government department, police and Public Prosecution Service have had internal complaints procedures. The external complaints authority is the National Ombudsman of the Netherlands. For the island authorities there are different arrangements. They have until 10 October 2012 to decide whether they want to appoint their own joint ombudsman or come within the jurisdiction of the National Ombudsman of the Netherlands.

The National Ombudsman  
Alex Brenninkmeijer

1) A.G. Mein, J.C.J. Boutellier et al., *Reflectie op de Nationale ombudsman*, Verwey-Jonker Instituut, Utrecht 2010.

# ‘What is your view?’

## Reflections on the citizen and government

*If government is to have a healthy relationship with the public, it must reflect on its relations with individual citizens. It cannot adopt a completely autonomous attitude towards individuals, businesses and institutions. In any democratic state governed by the rule of law, government and citizens are locked together in constant interaction. Each determines the role of the other. But that role is not immutable: it is subject to complex processes of change from day to day and from year to year.*

Good relations between government and the public cannot be taken for granted; indeed, they are currently a matter of great concern. Citizens are dissatisfied with ‘the government’ and government authorities regularly make negative remarks about the public. The public’s confidence in government is declining and so is government’s confidence in the public. Dramatic swings in voter allegiance cause uncertainty around election time and the views of floating voters are hard to fathom. Concrete complaints about quality of service are an important means of gauging relations between government and citizen.

The basis of the National Ombudsman’s job is dealing with complaints about government from individuals, businesses and institutions. It is important that complaints are taken seriously and that adequate measures are taken in response to them. The day-to-day work of the National Ombudsman provides a good starting point for reflection on the way government operates and the way individuals, businesses and institutions operate in relation to government. The National Ombudsman has various ways of communicating regarding his findings and insights to government and by doing so, helps to improve relations between government and the public. Reflection and feedback are key factors in the work of the National Ombudsman.

The Verwey-Jonker Institute, an independent national organization for social scientific research, recently conducted an independent study reflecting on the National Ombudsman and his office.<sup>2)</sup> It concludes that government bodies that have dealings with the National Ombudsman are almost unanimously positive about the experience: they regard him as a necessary watchdog and counterweight, giving the individual citizen a voice and forcing government to engage in constant quality improvement. The National Ombudsman is now better known as an institution and has lent traditional complaint handling a new dimension by translating the principle of fair treatment into day-to-day practice and by operating in a solutions-oriented way. The National Ombudsman and his office have succeeded in developing an approach that is broadly recognised within government as an effective means of improving relations with the public. This is why the 2010 annual report focuses on two kinds of reflection: firstly, it aims to pluck the fruits of the last five years by reflecting on the work of the National Ombudsman himself and analysing and describing the ‘ombuds method’;

secondly, it considers the great importance to government of the feedback the National Ombudsman provides.

### Feedback and the National Ombudsman

When the National Ombudsman was appointed in 2005, the House of Representatives instructed him to focus not just on the legal side of the relationship between citizen and government, but also on its social dimension. To achieve this, the Ombudsman has in the last five years developed the ombuds method. The new approach takes account not just of statutory rights and duties, but also of proper conduct – a notion translated into standards of proper conduct, such as promptness, accuracy, impartiality and proportionality.

Many interactions between citizens and government are more or less problem-free, even if they take the form of computer-generated letters and decisions. However, the day-to-day work of the Ombudsman shows that there are always situations in which standard solutions are not appropriate and where individual attention needs to be paid to a particular question. In cases like these, the ombuds method has proved effective, chiefly because it provides a way of resolving complaints and objections informally. The method usually involves the use of mediation techniques and skills to achieve more effective communication with the public. The study by the Verwey-Jonker Institute reveals broad agreement within government that the ombuds method is effective.

Partly because of the instruction from the House of Representative, the work of the National Ombudsman has expanded in two respects. Firstly, the response to citizens approaching him is now more differentiated. In addition to investigating cases and reporting on them, his Office now provides information, refers citizens elsewhere, practises intervention, conducts intake interviews and engages in mediation – consequences of the less legalistic and more personal approach. Close contacts with administrative authorities and their designated liaison officers provide a basis for swift action to achieve a direct solution to the problems of individual citizens. This differentiated response relies on early personal contact between the National Ombudsman’s investigatory staff and individual complainants. In practice, this proves to be an extremely effective means of communication. The front office telephone service is also an important channel, because it almost invariably provides the citizen with instant clarity on what he can do to solve his problem and whether there is any point in making a formal complaint to the National Ombudsman.

Secondly, the National Ombudsman has opened up a number of channels by which to provide government bodies with constant feedback based on knowledge and experience gained from his dealings with citizens. Although the legislation places the main emphasis on providing feedback by

2) A.G. Mein, J.C.J. Boutellier et al., *Reflectie op de Nationale ombudsman*, Verwey-Jonker Instituut, Utrecht 2010.

means of recommendations and reports, the use of the ombuds method is also proving to be effective. The key question to government is invariably 'How would you like to be treated if you were in this situation?'

## Feedback and government

When developing policy and organising its implementation, there are many lessons government can learn from the views of individuals, businesses and institutions. Government bodies and the professionals who work for them should look at themselves in the mirror every day and ask themselves what is the real purpose of their work. In doing so, they should always remember the important role that individuals, businesses and institutions play in our society and put themselves in their shoes.

It is often virtually impossible for government to have personal contact with individuals, businesses and institutions. This is particularly true as concerns the work of huge 'decision factories' like the Tax Department, the UWV (dealing among other things with social security), the Central Administrative Office for Exceptional Medical Insurance (CAK), the Care Insurance Board (CVZ) and the Central Judicial Collection Agency (CJIB). Agencies like these use large-scale computer systems to produce vast numbers of standard decisions with little human input – and things often go wrong. The needs of the individual citizen are frequently ignored and it is usually impossible to tailor responses to individual circumstances. Dysfunctional ICT systems give rise to multitudes of telephone calls, complaints and objections. These clog up the system, causing delays in processing and so producing still greater dissatisfaction. The UWV, the Tax Department/Allowances, the CAK and the CVZ (where people living outside the Netherlands are concerned) have all experienced major difficulties in this area. The root cause of such problems is lack of thought about implementation issues during the development of such ICT systems and sometimes the over-hasty introduction of substantive changes in government schemes. Moreover, the political desire for detailed control often results in over-complicated legislation that only specialists can understand and that takes little or no account of the possible difficulty of implementation. In view of the serious problems that the National Ombudsman witnesses, especially in the case of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and its executive agencies, he would recommend legislators seek to produce sound legislation that is not overly complex and not too dependent on other statutory systems. The House of Representatives should always be careful to ensure that legislation can be implemented in practice and that people can understand its intention.

Individual officials responsible for implementation should be given the freedom to consider complex situations on a case-by-case basis and offer a non-standard solution where appropriate. They should make use of that freedom and the bodies they work for should learn from such situations how the system can be improved. Direct contacts between government staff and citizens with questions or complaints show that officials are often ill-prepared for the task. Their fixation on their particular bit of law, their department and their administrative authority prevent them from thinking outside the box and 'understanding' the complaint. In such situations, the ombuds method is a good solution:

when someone submits an application, a view on a draft administrative decision, a complaint or an objection, the official immediately phones to discuss the matter with them. Adopting an open, interested and solution-oriented attitude, the official inquires into the problem and consults with the person concerned on the best way to deal with it. Wherever possible, he works with them to try to identify a solution within the statutory framework. In this way, he can help to achieve a less legalistic attitude towards citizens and reduce the need for litigation.

## Points of particular concern

The National Ombudsman raises two points of particular concern: firstly, government schemes should be comprehensible to the ordinary citizen and possible to implement in a reasonable way. Secondly, where difficulties arise in their implementation, the interests of the public should be served by wherever possible avoiding litigation or the use of legal terms to discuss the problem. Legal relationships are first and foremost human relationships. In the complex and rapidly changing society of today, people's foremost concern is with the quality of human relationships. Time and again, citizens say that litigation with a government body is the worst thing that could possibly happen to them. This feedback from citizens on the performance of government provides food for thought.

Policymakers and legislators should constantly ask themselves whether our political and administrative systems are doing enough to produce government schemes that the public can understand. Public satisfaction with the actions of government in relation to major events in their lives is perennially low. Government bodies that seek feedback from the public and use the results to improve their services achieve higher rates of public satisfaction. All government bodies should learn from this experience. Good service to the public is a vital part of the *raison d'être* of government. It is not a luxury that can be cut when times are hard. Good service to the public is an essential factor in the public's willingness to accept government action and to acknowledge its legitimacy.

Citizens should always be clearly informed of their rights and duties and, where problems arise, government should not automatically resort to formal complaints and objection procedures or costly and time-consuming litigation. It is often easy to find a solution simply by adopting an open attitude, contacting the citizen directly and making constructive attempts to achieve one. Individuals, businesses and institutions want to be taken seriously and treated with respect. Government and citizens have different roles to play but should deal with each other as equals. An egalitarian – adult – attitude on the part of government will generally elicit an adult response from the citizen. If government adopts a paternalistic or uncaring attitude, it is not surprising if relations with the public are poor. Many problems between government and citizen can be resolved by negotiation. The General Administrative Law Act provides a sound legal framework for relations between government bodies and individuals, businesses and institutions but government should not automatically resort to the law when problems arise. In the vast majority of cases, ordinary human communication between government and citizen will provide a sound basis for the effective implementation of government policy. Legal proceedings are better kept as a last resort.

# Statistical overview

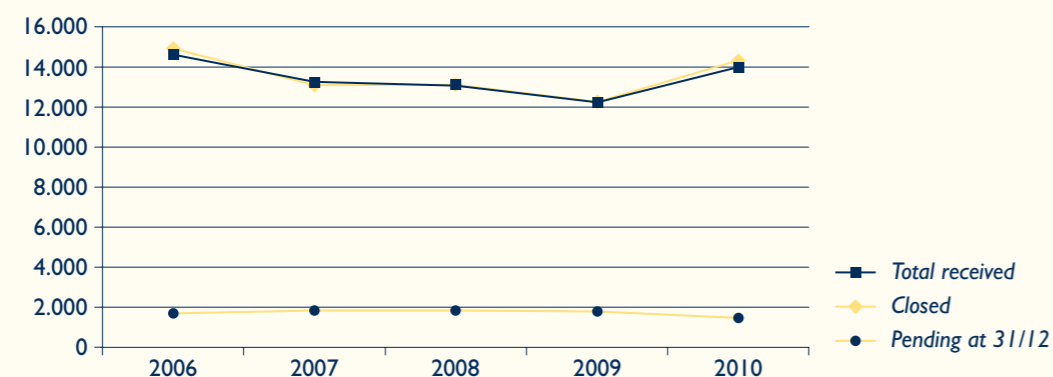
## Complaints

The National Ombudsman received 13,979 complaints in 2010: up 14% on 2009. This was the first increase since 2006: the result of problems in government but perhaps also of a publicity campaign urging the public to use the Ombudsman's free telephone number.

**Table 1 Volume of complaints**

Complaints	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Digital	5,166	5,340	5,828	4,912	8,025
By post	9,491	7,902	7,245	7,310	5,954
Total received	14,607	13,242	13,073	12,222	13,979
Closed	14,910	13,096	13,102	12,257	14,311
Pending at 31/12	1,704	1,850	1,831	1,800	1,467

**Figure 1 Volume of complaints**



People who phone the National Ombudsman or walk in off the street are served by front office staff. The front office has a free telephone number (0800 - 33 55555) and is open throughout the working week. People who call in often do so because they are unable to find their way around the government machine or because they have consumer issues. Front office staff explain how the National Ombudsman can help them or use their expertise to refer them to the right bodies. In 2010, the front office received 31,109 telephone enquiries.

Unlike previous years, 2010 saw little new legislation and hence few complaints on that subject. There were, however, various complaints about:

- ▶ the time taken by the Tax Department to process tax returns;
- ▶ confusion about the repayment of charges for ID cards by municipalities;
- ▶ sometimes over-hasty reporting to the Care Insurance Board of people alleged to be defaulting on their health care premiums, with attachment of earnings as a result.

Table 2 shows the volume of complaints broken down into the various areas of government policy.

**Table 2 Complaints received about government**

Complaints received	2008		2009		2010	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
<b>Ministries<sup>3)</sup></b>						
General affairs	14	0.1	15	0.1	11	0.1
Foreign Affairs <sup>4)</sup>	175	1.6	170	1.6	158	1.3
Security and Justice	1,230	11.0	1,086	10.5	1,233	10.4
Interior and Kingdom Relations <sup>5)</sup>	89	0.8	84	0.9	167	1.4
Education, Culture and Science	392	3.5	312	3.0	477	4.0
Finance	2,778	24.9	2,192	21.3	2,363	19.9
Defence	73	0.7	67	0.7	64	0.5
Social Affairs and Employment	1,238	11.1	1,209	11.7	1,625	13.7
Health, Welfare and Sport <sup>6)</sup>	1,766	15.9	1,534	14.9	1,597	13.4
Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation <sup>7)</sup>	95	0.8	124	1.2	156	1.3
Infrastructure and the Environment <sup>8)</sup>	496	4.4	631	6.1	537	4.5
<b>Police</b>	956	8.6	1,021	9.9	1,219	10.3
<b>Regulatory industrial organisations</b>	4	≈0	8	0.1	13	0.1
<b>Subnational government</b>						
Extraordinary investigating officers employed by municipalities not within the jurisdiction of the National Ombudsman	3	≈0	5	≈0	7	0.1
<b>Water boards</b>	120	1.1	140	1.4	120	1.0
<b>Municipalities</b>	1,570	14.1	1,509	14.6	1,890	15.9
<b>Provinces</b>	63	0.6	74	0.7	68	0.6
<b>Joint bodies</b>	89	0.8	130	1.3	170	1.4
<b>Total</b>	11,151	100	10,311	100	11,875	100

3) Including autonomous administrative authorities

4) Including Development Cooperation.

5) Including the work of three successive departments under different governments: Immigration and Integration; Housing, Communities and Integration, and Immigration and Asylum Policy.

6) Including Youth and Families.

7) Including ministries of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, and Economic Affairs.

8) Including ministries of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, and Transport, Public Works and Water Management.

## Methods

To uncover the real nature of the problem, complainants are always invited first of all to explain it, either by phone or face-to-face. A decision is then taken on the approach most likely to be effective, in view of the nature of the complaint. There are five possibilities.

### 1 Resolution via intervention

A staff member contacts the administrative authority involved and tries to obtain immediate resolution of the complainant's – often urgent and financial – problem. This approach is effective where a mistake can be corrected or if the real problem is the authority's failure to act. Close contacts between the National Ombudsman's staff and the liaison officers designated by authorities to deal with them are a major factor underlying the success of this approach. Liaison officers usually cooperate actively with such interventions.

### 2 Mediation

Mediators from the National Ombudsman's Office chair an interview between the complainant and the administrative authority. Often, the aim of such an interview is to normalise the relationship between the two and, if possible, to restore mutual trust so that the person in question will be able to deal amicably with the authority in future. A mediation interview may produce explanations or apologies.

### 3 Investigation leading to proper conduct decision and report

An investigation of the actions of the administrative authority culminates in a published report containing a decision on whether its conduct was proper. Reference can then be made to this report in later cases of a similar nature.

### 4 Investigation leading to letter

Here too, the actions of the administrative authority are investigated but – because the outcome of the investigation is of only limited interest (for example, only relevant to the complainant) – the investigation concludes with a letter that is not made public.

### 5 Discontinued or resolved

In some cases, an investigation is launched but then discontinued. There are several possible reasons for this. The complainant may say he does not wish it to continue. The complainant may cease responding to the Ombudsman's attempts to communicate. It may emerge in the course of the investigation that the Ombudsman is not in fact competent to deal with the case. Or the complaint may turn out to be manifestly unfounded.

In 2010, there was an increase in the number of investigations culminating in published reports containing proper conduct decisions (see table 3). This was the result of a deliberate policy decision prompted by the importance of ongoing application of the proper conduct criteria, of keeping the work of the National Ombudsman in the public eye, and of issuing recommendations to government. The increase was achieved through improvements in internal procedures.

Table 3 and figure 2 show the methods used to deal with complaints.

**Table 3 Method of dealing with complaints accepted for investigation**

Complaints	2008		2009		2010	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Resolution via intervention	4,120	89	3,550	88	2,973	79
Mediation					53	1
Investigation with proper conduct decision in report	324	7	303	8	382	10
Investigation with letter					136	4
Discontinued/resolved	134	3	176	4	213	6
Referred back to administrative authority	36	1	0	-	0	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,614</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4,029</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3,757</b>	<b>100</b>

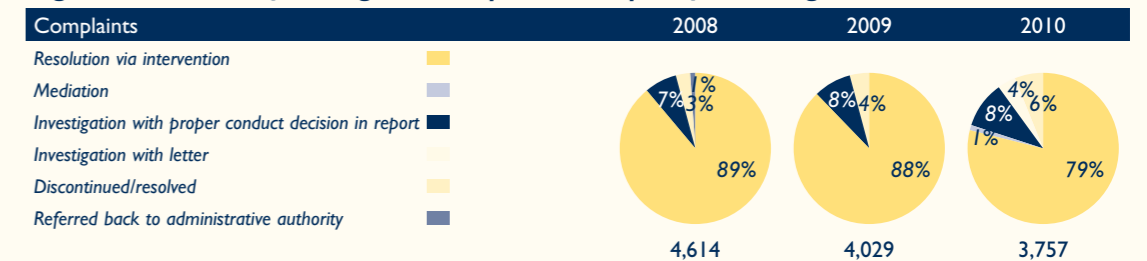
N.B. Some reports deal with more than one complaint.

In 2008, 322 reports dealt with 324 complaints.

In 2009, 295 reports dealt with 303 complaints.

In 2010, 377 reports dealt with 382 complaints.

**Figure 2 Method of dealing with complaints accepted for investigation**



## Investigations undertaken on the Ombudsman's own initiative

Apart from investigating in-coming complaints, the National Ombudsman may also undertake investigations on his own initiative. Such investigations focus on structural problems in the relationship between citizens and government. They address the root causes of problems rather than individual cases and aim to cast light on the causes of friction between citizens and government. The Ombudsman can then advise government what to do about them. The reason for undertaking such an investigation may be a flood of complaints on a particular issue or signals picked up from the media or from civil society.

Investigations undertaken on the Ombudsman's own initiative may culminate either in reports containing proper conduct decisions or in guidelines for administrative authorities. In the latter case, the Ombudsman refrains from criticising the past actions of government, but offers guidance on concrete improvements in the way government fulfils its executive responsibilities in the particular area concerned.

In 2010, eight such investigations were completed. Two of these led to the issue of guidelines for administrative authorities. One of them concerned the quality of service provided by government call centres (report 2010/010) and led to the issue of five basic principles of proper provision in this area. Another, on enforcement (report 2010/235), resulted in twelve guidelines for municipalities on the proper treatment of enforcement requests from members of the public.

A report was also published concerning government treatment of suspected fraud by people starting up new one-man businesses while on unemployment benefits (report 2010/025). In this case, the House of Representatives was one of a number of parties that called for an Ombudsman investigation.

A report on the clarity of government correspondence (report 2010/085) concerned the incomprehensible decision letters sent by the CAK to people applying for reimbursement of health care costs. The National Ombudsman had been receiving complaints about this for some time. The report pinpointed four areas of particular concern: the clarity of the language used in the letters, the clarity of the decisions, the impersonal tone of the letters, and their length. It also offered concrete tips on the proper handling of administrative decisions. Other administrative authorities have shown an interest in this investigation and the resulting tips.

A report was also issued on the inclusion of aliens in the Schengen Information System and information provision on this matter (report 2010/115). Undesirable aliens are entered in the Schengen Information System without taking sufficient account of the far-reaching consequences (potentially including exclusion from the entire territory of the European Union).

Finally, investigations into carers' allowances for social network foster care and the handling of complaints by the Youth Care Agencies were concluded, and mediation was used to obtain an effective compensation scheme for military veterans.

## Reports

In 2010, 377 reports were published containing proper conduct decisions (2009: 295). In 297 of them (=78%), the complaint was found to be fully or partially justified. This means that, in a substantial proportion of cases in which an investigation took place, the National Ombudsman found in favour of the complainant on at least one count.

In addition to proper conduct decisions, reports often contain one or more recommendations. These are sometimes directed at resolving an individual case but may also be designed to prevent complaints arising in future.

Table 4 shows the impact of the recommendations.

**Table 4 Effectiveness of reports**

Reports	2008		2009		2010	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Number of reports	322		295		377	
Number of reports expressing approval	35		42		53	
Number of recommendations in reports <sup>1)</sup>	191		133		141	
percentage of recommendations implemented <sup>2)</sup>		93		90		94

<sup>1)</sup>Total numbers in both individual reports and reports on investigations undertaken on the Ombudsman's own initiative.

<sup>2)</sup>The numbers relate to recommendations from reports issued either in the same year or in previous years; partly because of the lapse of time between the issue of a recommendation and the response to it, the numbers are only indicative.

## Complaints about the National Ombudsman or his staff

In 2010, the National Ombudsman received 42 letters that were considered to constitute complaints about him and his staff (2009: 35). Of these, 39 were resolved, as were a further four complaints made in 2009. Twenty complaints were found to be justified and seven unfounded (some of them manifestly so). Sixteen complaints were either withdrawn or declared inadmissible. The complaints concerned matters such as delays in processing complaints, failure to respond, telephone services, and partiality. In addition, 89 requests for review were received, of which four were granted.

## Management

The philosophy of the National Ombudsman is that a constant improvement in levels of proper conduct should be expected not only in the performance of administrative authorities, but also in that of his own professionals and organisation. In 2010, a number of projects were implemented with a view to improving his in-house organisation on the basis of the five key values established in 2009: service, targeted influence, professionalism, transparency and knowledge sharing.

To improve quality of service, complainants were asked to provide feedback. Shortly after the closure of their cases, they were presented with a series of questions that they could answer either by phone or online. The questions concerned the quality of service provided by the investigator, satisfaction with the outcome of the complaints procedure, and an overall satisfaction with the National Ombudsman. From the feedback received so far, complainants' reactions seem to be extraordinarily positive: the average score for quality of service is 8.4 and the average overall score is 8.2.

Since 2010, the National Ombudsman's Office telephone help desk has also been expected to meet a number of quality standards. These flow from a recommendation issued to government and relate to accessibility, reliability, helpfulness, courtesy and public familiarity with the service.

A TV and online publicity campaign was run to encourage the public to use the Ombudsman's free telephone number. The aim was to publicise the existence of the National Ombudsman, especially to people who have problems with government bodies, find it hard to stand up for their own interests or have to deal with government on a fairly regular basis. The campaign produced a deluge of phone calls and an increase in the number of complaints received.

At the end of 2010, the National Ombudsman launched a new website at [www.nationaleombudsman.nl](http://www.nationaleombudsman.nl). People can use the new site to lodge complaints about administrative authorities but it also provides advice on what action they can take themselves to obtain a solution to their problems. The National Ombudsman sees this as another way to help people who have problems with government.

## Financial affairs

Table 5 shows the budgeted and actual figures for the income and expenditure of the National Ombudsman's Office in 2008, 2009 and 2010. In 2010, salaries accounted for 73% of total expenditure (€ 14.6 million), while 27% went on non-staff costs and other costs relating to the deployment of staff.

**Table 5 Budgeted and actual figures**

Amounts x € 1.000	2008		2009		2010	
	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income
Finalised draft budget	10,931	39	11,877	39	13,758	39
Supplementary budgets	1,494	39	1,950	75	557	0
Total budget	12,425	39	13,827	114	14,315 <sup>1)</sup>	39
Actual figures	12,325	144	13,750	131	14,644	105
Difference	100	105	77	17	329	66

<sup>1)</sup> Figure based on current information. The Final Budget Act may produce a slight correction.

## Staff

Table 6 shows the maximum authorised staffing levels and average actual staffing levels at the National Ombudsman's Office in 2008, 2009 and 2010.

**Table 6 Maximum authorised staffing levels and average actual staffing levels in FTEs (not including office-holders)<sup>1)</sup>**

	2008	2009	2010
Maximum authorised staffing levels	150	149	149
Average actual staffing levels	134	140	143

<sup>1)</sup> The maximum authorised staffing level corresponds with the term 'bezettingsruimte', as used in the Policy Document on Central Government Reform in the Netherlands (Nota Vernieuwing Rijksdienst).

In the course of 2010, an in-house diversity policy was drawn up. A statistical study was conducted to check whether the staff of the Office were currently sufficiently 'diverse' as compared with central government staff and the labour force as a whole. This proved to be the case but the position will be monitored annually to see whether action is needed to increase diversity.

### **Production credits**

Cover photo shows Alex Brenninkmeijer, National Ombudsman of the Netherlands.

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