

Helping you put things right

Annual review 2014



Message from the Head of the DCS

The end of 2014 saw the eighth year of the Dental Complaints Service (DCS), which continues to adapt and improve service delivery in order to help mutually resolve private dental complaints. Read more about our year...

Last year saw further change and development at the DCS, with the introduction of a new complaints management system in May. The new database has improved complaint classification, enabling us to better differentiate between complaints that fall within the service's remit and can be taken forward, and the enquiries that require signposting to other services or organisations.

Over the longer term, the new system will provide a better indication of work received at the DCS that is substantively completed by the service. In the short term, it has had the effect of exaggerating a decline in the number of complaints received compared to last year, as you will see in the statistics on page 8. It is important to note that we continue to carry out a significant amount of signposting work alongside our main in-house resolution activity. This new system will also allow the DCS to improve reporting in the coming year.

Satisfaction with the service among patients and dental professionals alike continues to remain constant, and in some areas improve, despite the challenges following the introduction of the new complaints management system. You can read more about our customer satisfaction results on page 3.

Early dispute resolution in private dental care is still quite new, and so we are always looking for new ways to refine and improve our service. One way that we are doing that is by organising Expert Advice Seminars; we hosted the first session in November 2014 and invited organisations offering a similar service to us, representatives from the dental profession, consumer bodies and those with experience of complaints handling and mediation. Among the topics we discussed were the complaints processes for other consumer complaints services, methods of assessing effectiveness and customer satisfaction, as well as marketing and promoting services. The aim is to learn about best practice in other settings, as well as receive feedback about our role so that we can continuously improve.

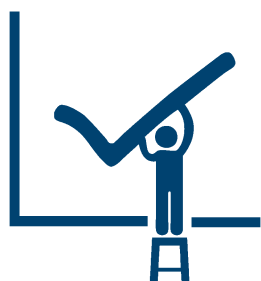
And finally, at the end of another busy year, my thanks go out to the DCS staff for their hard work as well as the DCS volunteer panel members who generously give their time and skills. Thanks too, to the dental profession for their continued engagement with the service.

Hazel Adams
DCS Head of Service

Customer service satisfaction

At the DCS we are committed to continuous learning and improvement, so that we can provide an effective and efficient service for everyone that uses us. As part of that process, we regularly ask both the patients and the dental professionals who used the service to give us feedback on how we performed.

Since last year, we are delighted to have made steady improvement across all areas, receiving 100% positive comments about the courtesy of our officers from patients. We scored well in all other areas of feedback that we asked about, however we are not complacent and will continue to seek feedback on how we perform to help us learn and improve.



Feedback results in Excellent and Good categories	Patients %		Dental professionals %	
	2014	2013	2014	2013
Information finding	90	76	-	-
Speed of response	98	85	88	87
Courtesy of complaints officer	100	87	92	95
Clarity of response	98	96	88	87
Recommendations offered	95	79	64	68
Quality of response	97	85	83	84
Response timescales	97	82	88	87

“I particularly liked the patient and thorough approach of the complaints officer. He was well mannered and reassuring whilst being completely impartial” **Patient**

Case studies

Our three-step service assists patients and dental professionals in resolving complaints...

Local resolution first

We will always suggest that a patient writes to their dental professional and gives them the opportunity to resolve matters first. In our experience, they often welcome the opportunity to deal with any patient concerns.

Facilitated resolution

If a patient is not satisfied with the response from their dental professional and is unable to resolve the matter, our complaints officers will then work with both parties to try to reach a resolution. Our service is impartial therefore we do not take sides.

Panel meetings

If we cannot help both parties resolve the complaint, we will arrange a panel meeting with their agreement; this is the last stage of our process. The panel consists of two lay (non-dental professional) members and a dental professional. Our team of UK-wide trained volunteers will hear both sides of the complaint and work towards facilitating an amicable resolution between the patient and the dental professional. If this is not possible, the panel will make a recommendation in order to bring the matter to a close.

On the following pages we outline some recent cases that the DCS helped to resolve...

“Clear and helpful information given in a friendly manner” Patient

Case study – local resolution

The complaint

The patient had a denture made at a cost of £3,000.

He stated that he had problems with the attachments on the denture which did not fit correctly since the denture was placed. The dentist had attempted to repair the attachments on several occasions but these had continued to fail.

The patient was not happy that he had to use a fixative to secure the denture on a daily basis and wrote to the practice to try to get a resolution to the problem. He attended an appointment with the principal dentist, who offered an alternative solution at a cost of £8,000 which the patient declined. The practice advised the patient to take up the matter with the dentist.

The outcome sought

The patient was not happy to return to the dentist and was seeking a full refund of £3,000 for the denture.

How the DCS assisted in resolving the complaint

On the advice of the DCS, the patient wrote to the dentist detailing his complaint and stating how he would like this to be resolved. The dentist originally made an offer of £1,000 which the patient declined explaining that the minimum he was willing to accept was £2,500. The dentist agreed to a refund of £2,500 which resolved the matter.

Case study – local resolution

The complaint

The patient attended an appointment with the dentist for a partial upper and lower denture after implant treatment. The patient paid £14,000 for both dentures, however, felt that they were loose and ill-fitting. She returned four times to have the dentures adjusted to no avail and had a final fitting appointment booked. The patient contacted the DCS for advice and it was agreed that she would attend the appointment and try to resolve the matter with her dentist. However, if this failed, she would need to put her complaint in writing to him.

The outcome sought

The patient stated that if the fitting appointment was unsuccessful, she would like a full refund.

How the DCS assisted in resolving the complaint

The DCS contacted the patient following the appointment who said that the new partial dentures had been fitted and she was happy with the result.



Case study – local resolution

The complaint

The patient had an implant retained crown fitted. She told the DCS that the crown was too long and too wide causing an overbite; also the colour did not match with her other teeth. She had raised her concerns verbally with the dentist 2-3 times but had not been able to resolve the matter.

The outcome sought

When she contacted the DCS, the patient was unsure of the outcome that she was looking for. The DCS advised her to think about this and once she had decided on the outcome, write to the dentist detailing this.

How the DCS assisted in resolving the complaint

The patient wrote to the dentist, as advised by the DCS. In order to resolve her complaint, she requested remedial treatment at no extra charge.

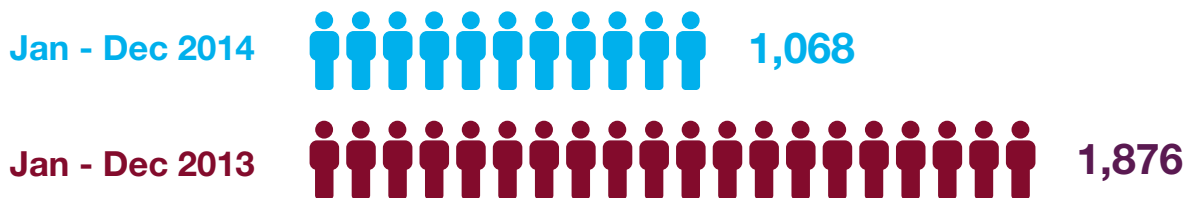
In his response, the dentist offered to make a new crown at no additional charge which the patient accepted.



Total number of telephone calls to the DCS local rate number



Number of complaints dealt with by the DCS



Enquiries **1,012** May to December 2014*    

In addition to the complaints dealt with by the DCS in 2014, the DCS team dealt with over 1,000 enquiries to the service. Whilst not resulting in a complaint to be taken forward by the DCS, they required other actions by the service, which can be summarised into four general categories:

- Complaints falling outside the service’s remit signposted to other organisations
- Complainants deciding not to pursue complaints or to pursue them without the service’s assistance
- Complainants not responding to requests for further information
- Dental professionals requesting complaint handling advice

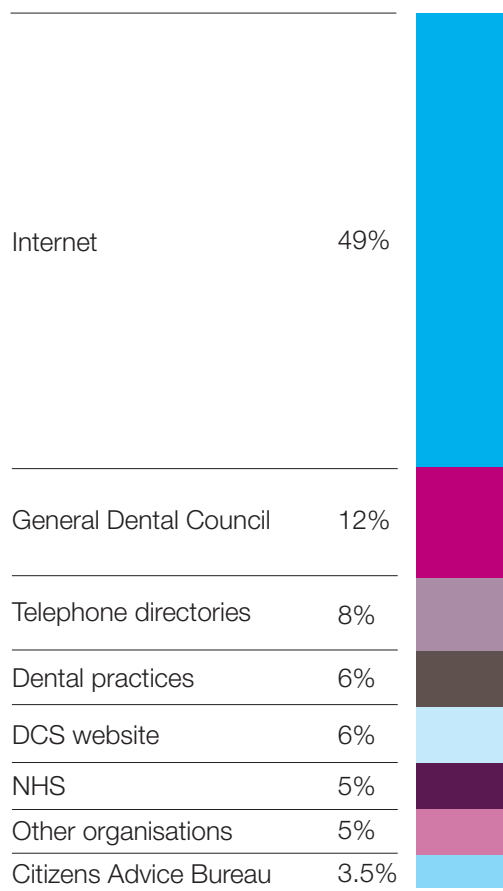
The top five types of enquiries, which represent 76% of the total enquiries received by the DCS in 2014, were:

- Complaints relating to NHS treatment (486 enquiries)
- Complaints relating to treatment received outside the UK (95 enquiries)
- Requests for clinical advice (75 enquiries)
- Complainants deciding not to pursue the complaint (64 enquiries)
- Complaints falling outside the service’s time remit (49 enquiries)

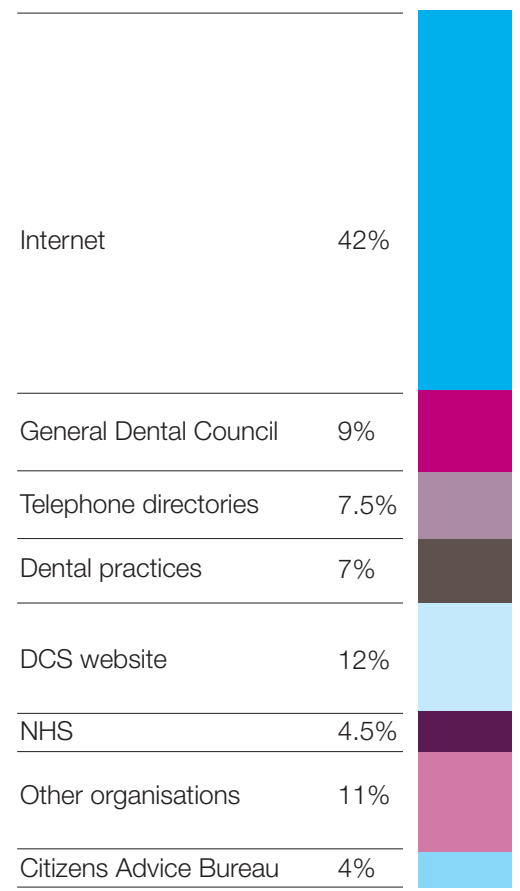
*Figures taken from the implementation of the new complaint management system, introduced in May 2014. Prior to that there was no ability within the old system to differentiate between complaints and enquiries – all were logged as ‘complaints’

Contact source

2014



2013



“I liked the friendliness of the service and also the help, speed and efficiency” Dental professional

Case study – facilitated resolution

The complaint

The patient attended an appointment with the dentist for an implant and paid £2,650. Following this, the patient advised that she had recurrent infections, pain and discomfort. A second opinion was obtained from another dentist and the patient wrote to the dentist enclosing this.

The outcome sought

In order to resolve the complaint the patient sought a full refund of £2,650.

How the DCS assisted in resolving the complaint

The patient contacted the DCS and said that the dentist had not responded to her letter. The DCS got in touch with the dentist who explained that he had not received the patient's complaint letter. The DCS sent a copy to the dentist who advised that he would consult with his indemnifiers for advice. During this time the patient revisited the second dentist and was quoted £400 in order to remove her existing four-unit implant retained bridge.

As the patient had still not received a response, the DCS followed this up with the dentist. He advised that he had spoken to his indemnifiers and had decided to provide the patient with a full refund.

Although there was an initial delay, the patient received a refund for the full amount of £2,650, which she accepted in resolution of the complaint.

Case study – facilitated resolution

The complaint

The patient visited the dentist for crowns at upper right 1 (UR1), upper right 2 (UR2) and upper left 1 (UL1) and also a veneer at upper left 2 (UL2). She paid £800 (£200 per tooth). The dentist also carried out root treatment on upper right 2 (UR2).

The patient advised that the first set of crowns were too bright. The second set was too narrow, and there was also a gap between the crowns and her gum (the dentist had explained to the patient that the gum would grow into the space) and the veneer was too thick and crooked.

After a few weeks the patient went back to the dentist as there was still a gap between the crowns and her gum. The dentist filled this with a white filling, however, the patient was still dissatisfied.

The patient returned again after two weeks to have the crowns replaced. When the dentist fitted temporary crowns for her to try, she noted that there was still a gap, however, she was not too worried about this as they were only temporarily fixed. A week later, when the patient returned to have the permanent crowns fitted, the dentist could not remove the temporary ones so they were left in. The patient was worried that they would not last and was unhappy about the gap.

After a few weeks, food was being trapped in the gap and the patient felt toothache on the UL 2 where the veneer had been fitted. The patient went back to the dentist who carried out x-rays and advised that the UR2 had an infection and needed to be root treated again. The patient made an appointment, however, she felt that she had given the dentist ample time to put things right. She therefore went to another dentist.

The second dentist advised her that the root canal treatment had not been done correctly.

The patient wrote to the practice with her complaint and received a holding letter from the Complaints Manager. A full response was then received from the dentist advising that there was nothing more that she could do.

The outcome sought

The patient wanted a refund as well as a contribution towards remedial treatment. She confirmed that she would obtain a new treatment plan from the second dentist.

How the DCS assisted in resolving the complaint

The DCS advised the patient to write to the dentist once she had obtained a new treatment plan, stating how she would like the complaint to be resolved.

The patient wrote to the dentist with a treatment plan totalling £1,305, however, she did not receive a reply. The DCS contacted the dentist who advised that she had consulted with her indemnifier, but had yet to receive a response from them.

The patient contacted the DCS saying that she had received a letter from the dentist requesting the x-rays and clinical report from the second dentist which she would be sending recorded delivery that day.

Following this, the patient informed the DCS that the dentist had written to her offering £935.15 in order to resolve the complaint, which she had accepted.

The patient received a refund which concluded the matter.



Case study – facilitated resolution

The complaint

The patient visited the dentist for root canal treatment, which was completed over a couple of appointments at a cost of £350. A few months later, the patient started to experience pain and discomfort. She attended an appointment with a new dentist who advised her that the filling which had been placed following the root canal treatment was temporary and had now fallen out.

The outcome sought

The patient was not happy to return to the original dentist as she had lost confidence and therefore wanted a full refund of £350.

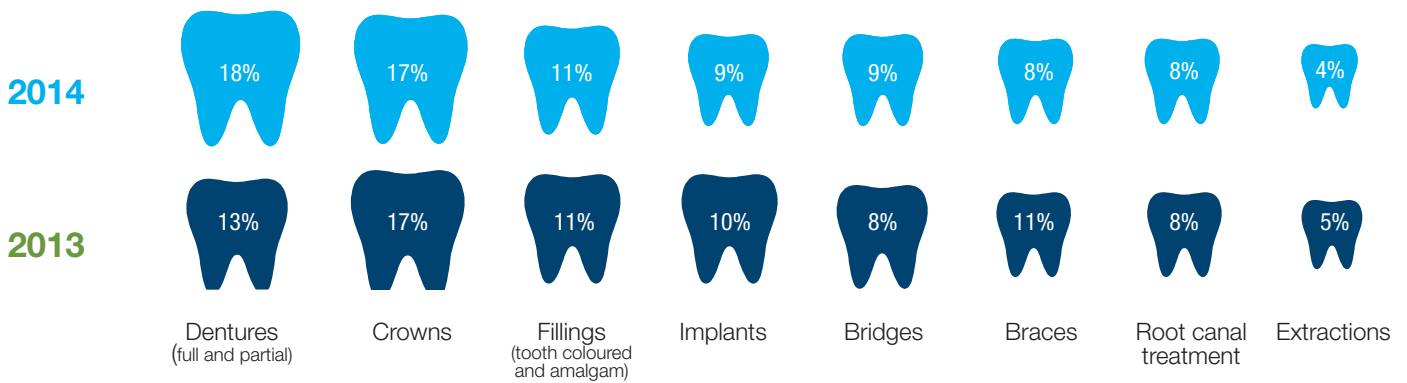
How the DCS assisted in resolving the complaint

The DCS advised the patient to write to the dentist, stating her complaint, and how she would like this to be resolved and to allow 10 working days for a response. The patient contacted the DCS for further assistance as she did not receive a reply to her complaint letter. The DCS got in touch with the dentist who said that he would contact his indemnifiers for advice and would respond to the patient.

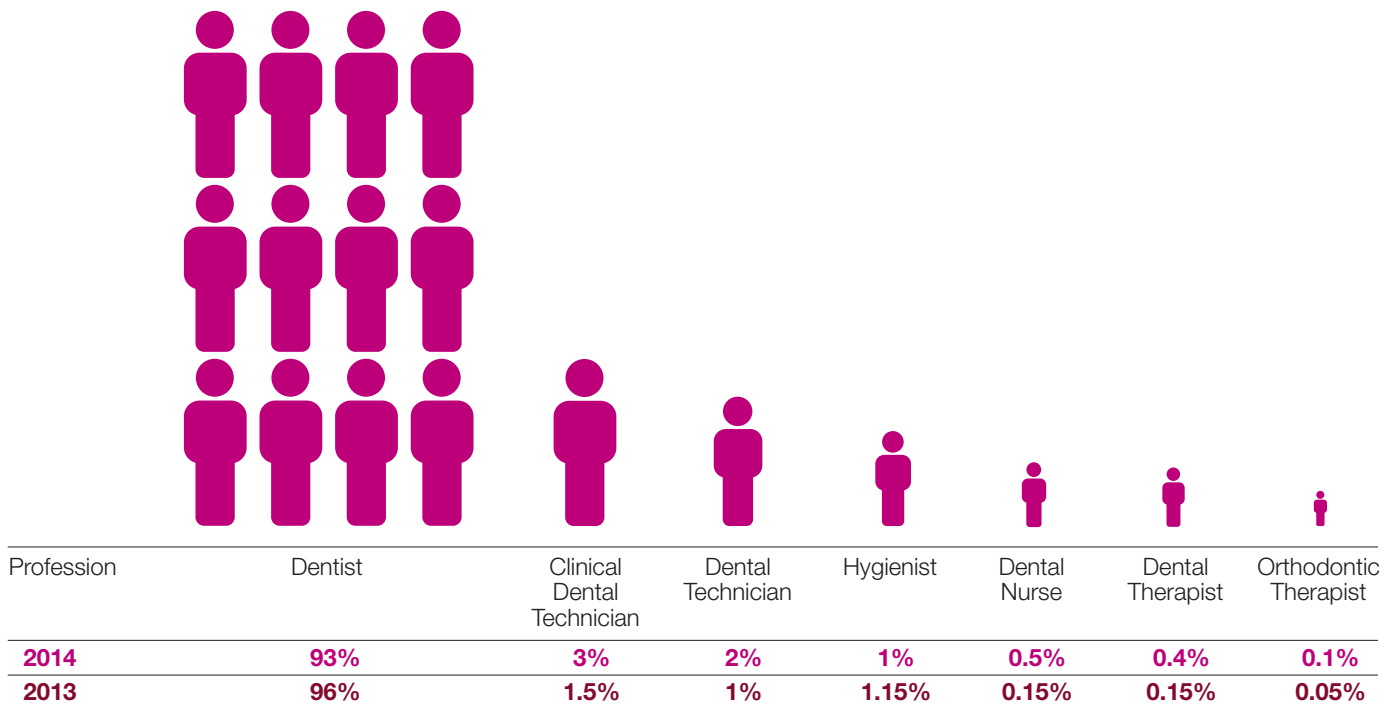
Following this, the patient received a letter from the dentist offering a full refund in resolution to the complaint.



Top areas of complaint for treatment issues



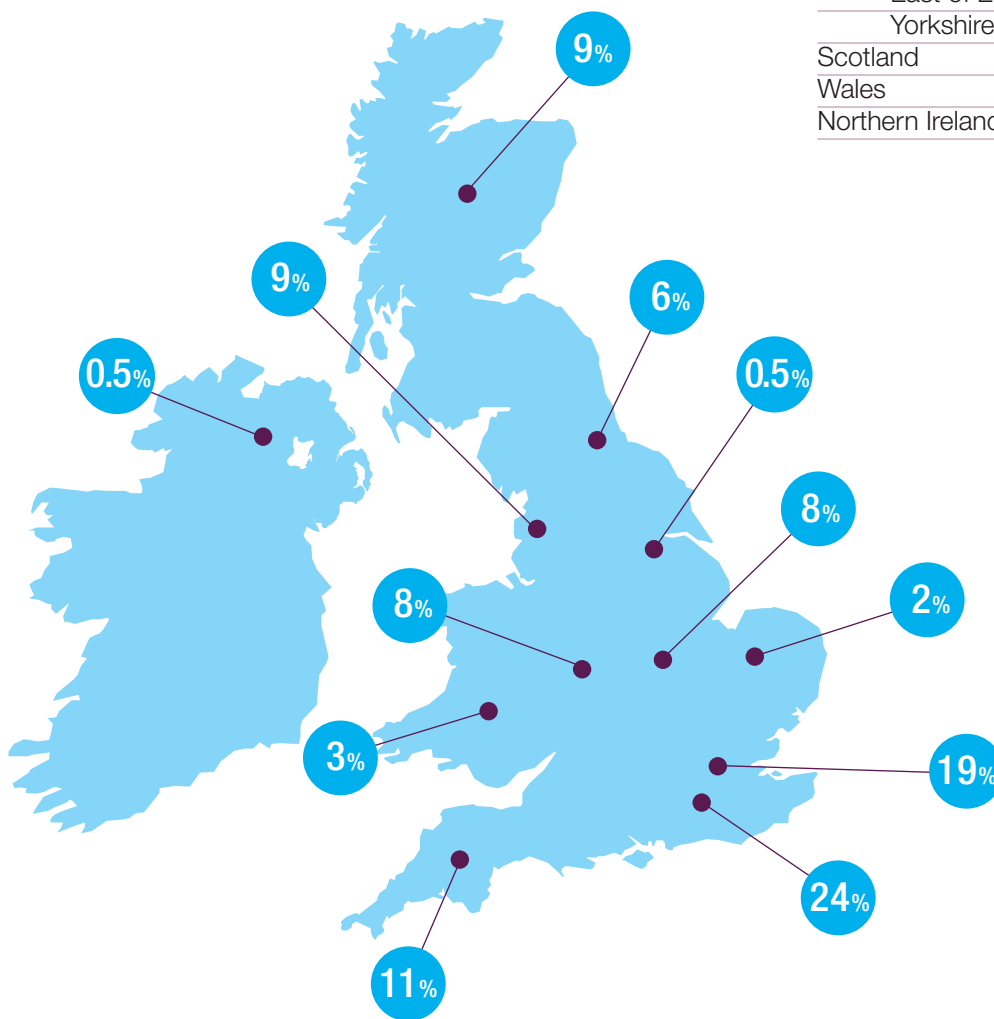
Who did patients complain about?



“I expected the service to be judgemental but it most certainly was not. Very pleased” Dental professional

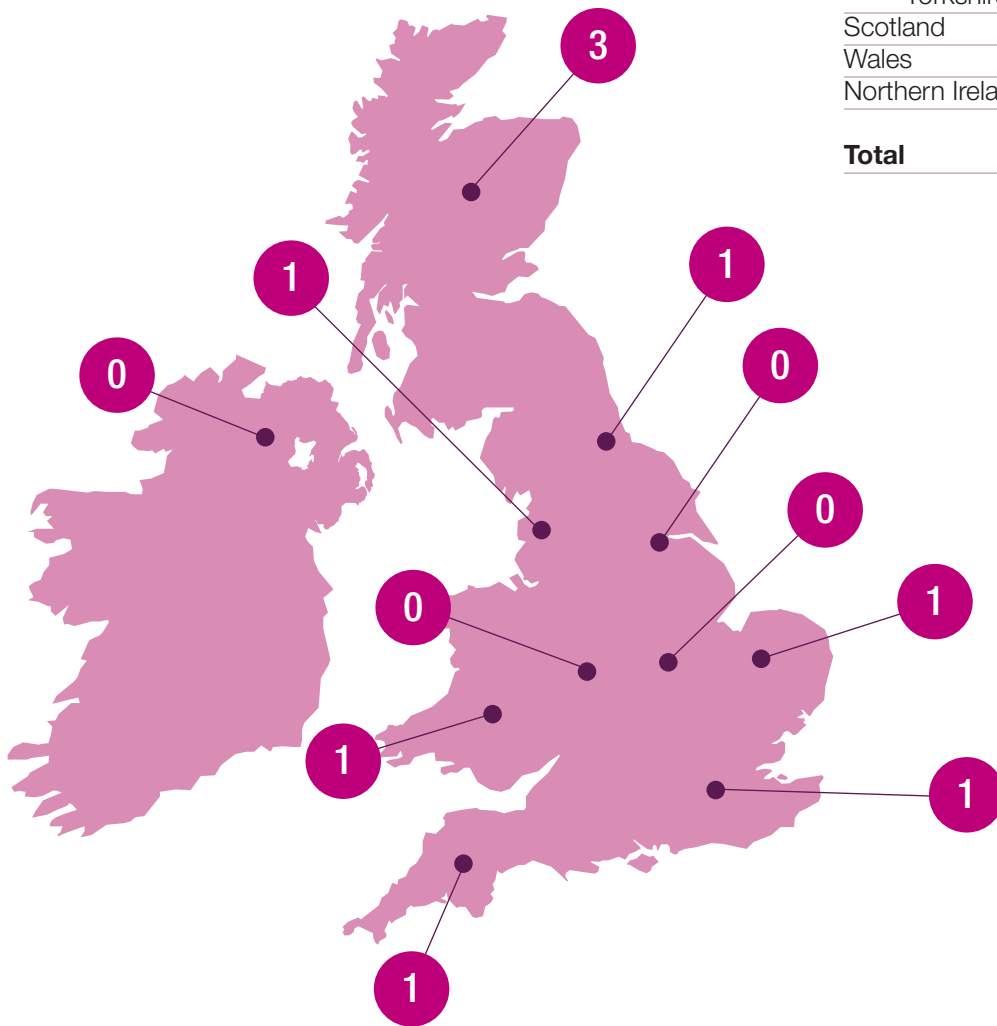
Geography of complaints

	2014	2013
England	87.5%	88%
South East	24%	21%
London	19%	18%
South West	11%	7%
North West	9%	11%
West Midlands	8%	8%
East Midlands	8%	6%
North East	6%	2%
East of England	2%	9%
Yorkshire & Humber	0.5%	6%
Scotland	9%	7%
Wales	3%	3%
Northern Ireland	0.5%	2%



Panel meetings

	2014	2013
England	5	13
South East	1	6
North East	1	0
North West	1	2
South West	1	2
East of England	1	1
East Midlands	0	1
West Midlands	0	1
Yorkshire & Humber	0	0
Scotland	3	2
Wales	1	1
Northern Ireland	0	2
Total	9	18



“What I liked most regarding the service was the professional manner, clarity, timescales and courteous way in which my complaint was dealt with” Patient

Case study – panel meeting

The complaint

The dentist prescribed the patient a course of Invisalign orthodontic treatment which he anticipated would take approximately 18 months. The treatment took over 3 years, following which the patient was not happy with the results; she advised that the wire caused her pain, that she experienced ulcers from the irritation and that her front teeth crossed over. She also felt that her side tooth had started to relapse, that there was cement still present as well as tooth discolouration. The patient also stated that she had not received a retainer for the lower teeth.

The outcome sought

The patient informed the dentist of her concerns and requested a refund of £3,000. The dentist offered the patient free remedial treatment which she declined as she did not want the dentist to carry out any further treatment. The patient contacted the DCS who attempted to facilitate a resolution between the two parties. However, as an agreement could not be reached a panel meeting was arranged.

The panel meeting

The complaint was discussed in detail, however, the patient and dentist could not come to an agreement. The panel therefore considered their recommendation.

The panel felt that appropriate treatment had been provided by the dentist and also, in order to meet the patient’s expectations, remedial work had been carried out free of charge.

An offer had also been made by the dentist for a colleague who was a specialist orthodontist to carry out additional work at no extra cost to the patient which had been declined. The panel therefore found that there was no complaint to answer in relation to the case.

“Nice, sensitive, gentle and polite approach” Dental professional

Case study – panel meeting

The complaint

The patient attended an appointment with his dentist who fitted a bridge on the lower right teeth (LR3 – LR5) at a cost of £1,170. The dentist subsequently fitted a full upper denture and a bridge on the lower left teeth (LL5 – LL7) for which the patient paid £3,500 and £2,500 respectively. The patient was unhappy with the partial denture as there was a gap between the denture and the lower left bridge that affected his bite. He also felt that the upper denture looked too large and was trapping food debris behind his upper right 1 (UR1) and upper left 1 (UL1) teeth. He believed that the upper denture should have included a titanium bar, which he had not received. The patient also felt that both bridges were trapping food debris and that he had been charged £780, in addition to his original treatment plan, for which he had not been given an explanation.

The outcome sought

The patient contacted the DCS and was advised to make the dentist aware of his concerns, which he did during a visit to the practice. Following this, the dentist sent him a cheque refund of £3,500 for the upper denture, which the patient declined by returning the cheque. The patient visited a new dentist for a second opinion and was provided with a treatment estimate totalling £9,600 for the possible removal and replacement of the existing bridges as well as a new upper denture.

The patient wrote to the dentist requesting a full refund of £7,950 which included the additional £780 charge. The DCS attempted to facilitate a resolution between both parties; however the dentist felt that a refund for the lower restorative work was not appropriate.

In the absence of an agreement between both parties, the DCS organised a panel meeting.

The panel meeting

During the meeting, the patient advised that he would accept a refund of £5,000 in resolution of the complaint, which the dentist agreed to. As a result, the panel endorsed the agreement reached at the meeting.

Plans for 2015

Expert Advice Seminars

The DCS will work with similar organisations, the dental profession and also mediation services in order to receive feedback and further improve the service.

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New Complaints Management System

We will consistently review our processes, procedures and reporting to enable the service to work ever more efficiently.

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Promotion of the DCS

We will continue to raise awareness of our early dispute resolution services to the public and dental professionals who may be in need of our assistance.

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put things right

Annual review 2014

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Call us

020 8253 0800

Our opening hours are Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Calls to this number cost the same as a local call.

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Email us

info@dentalcomplaints.org.uk

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Visit us at our website

www.dentalcomplaints.org.uk

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Write to

Dental Complaints Service
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2 Cherry Orchard Road
Croydon CR0 6BA

We are committed to promoting and developing equal opportunities in all our work. We want to make sure that everyone can access our services. If you would like a copy of this publication in a different format (for example, large print), please contact us.

This publication is also available in Welsh.