

CASE STUDY: Introducing Mediation into a Professional Association



The Association of Principal Fire Officers (APFO) and Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) are the professional associations for principal fire officers.

Need

- 🔥 To reduce the time and costs involved in resolving disputes.
- 🔥 Guidance to help negate many of the cases APFO get involved with.

Project

To provide mediation training to APFO and CFOA members in the form of Accredited Core Mediation Skills, Accredited Certificate in Mediation Skills and shorter conflict management courses.

Outcomes

In-house statistics revealed that when using a mediator, 66% of cases were resolved easily; in comparison to cases conducted without using a mediator where only 8.3% were resolved easily.

The Brief

The world in which Principal Officers operate in is a far more complex one since the service modernisation agenda has gathered pace. As a result POs are now more exposed to risk than they used to be, while at the same time have less employment protection than their counterparts in local government authorities.

“In late December 2007 APFO recognised the lack of robust Grievance and Discipline Guidance within the scheme and conditions of service for the most senior officers in the service and the toll this was taking on individuals and the organisation.”

Chris Griffin APFO Secretary

Workloads in mediation work since the repeal of the 1985 Discipline Regulations (2003) has increased and many Fire and Rescue Authorities do not have appropriate and suitable arrangements in place to deal with matters of performance or discipline arising from principal fire officers' work. APFO and Fire and Rescue Authorities can spend an inordinate amount of time and money on resolving any disputes that arise between the parties, with a financial cost and a human cost to a mis-managed case.

The brief was to implement mediation:

- As a route to dealing with performance and discipline issues.
- To reduce the time, and costs, of managing grievance and disciplinary cases.
- To provide better guidance to negate many of the cases APFO get involved with.

The Project

CMP has provided Mediation training to APFO and CFOA members since 2004 in the form of Accredited Core Mediation Skills, Accredited Certificate in Mediation Skills and shorter conflict management courses.

Outcomes

Authorities that have either a robust Discipline and Grievance procedure in place for their most senior managers or have those **same managers trained in mediation skills** tend to **attract fewer problems** than those that don't. Anecdotal evidence indicates services with trained mediators recognise early problems and resolve them.

Figure 1 (see next page) shows the interventions that APFO have been involved with, and whether the service involved has had trained mediators within the team. One third of cases had a mediator within the team and of those 66% were resolved relatively easily. In comparison two thirds of the cases did not have a mediator, and the majority of those proved to be difficult with only 8.3% (one case) resolved easily.

In the light of the evidence, **APFO supports their top teams having mediation skills in-house.**

Figure 1

Case	Mediator within team?	Outcome
Attempt to dismiss fellow Principal Officer	No	D
Capability	No	D
Capability issue	No	D
Compromise agreement	No	D
Difference of opinion	No	D
Discipline formal action proposed but compromise reached	No	D
Discipline leading to ill health retirement	No	D
Negotiation of Compromise agreement	No	D
Pay issue	No	D
Pursuit of ill health pension	No	D
Pursuit of injury pension	No	D
Injury award and tax issues	Yes	D
Reduction in PO cover	Yes	D
Refusal of Authority to follow advice of Minister in compensation payment.	No	R
Accusations over ethics	Yes	R
Assistance to Widow	Yes	R
Compromise agreement and pension over performance	Yes	R
Pension Dispute	Yes	R

Key: R=Resolved easily; D=Complex/Expensive