



**Civil Service
Commissioners**
for Northern Ireland

Complaints Handling Procedure

**ENSURING APPOINTMENT ON MERIT
AND SUPPORTING ETHICAL STANDARDS**

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1. Introduction

This document sets out the procedure by which you can make a complaint in relation to the service you receive from the Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland (CSC NI).

CSC NI welcomes complaints as everyone has the right to expect a good service from public bodies. We regard the opportunity to respond to complaints as a way of improving the quality of the service we provide.

Our procedure is based on, and complies with, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman's (NIPSO) Model Complaints Handling Procedure, published on 1 July 2023.

2. Who can make a complaint?

Anyone, whether a civil servant or member of the public, may make a complaint about his / her experience of dealing with the Commissioners and/or Secretariat. If you enjoyed a positive experience, we would like to hear about that too.

3. What is a complaint and where do I send it?

A Complaint is defined as:-

An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more civil servants/members of the public about the Civil Service of Commissioners' action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland.

A complaint is distinct from an enquiry or a service request.

There are a number of ways in which you can make your complaint, including verbally by telephone. However we may require you to put your complaint in writing in order to ensure that an appropriate response is issued.

You can:

- Write to the Commissioners' Secretary: Secretary to the Civil Service Commissioners
7th Floor
Erskine House
20-32 Chichester Street
Belfast
BT1 4GF
- E-mail the Commissioners' Secretary: info@niccommissioners.org
- Telephone: 02890 523577
- Write to the Civil Service Commissioners' Chairperson at the address above.

4. What can I complain about and what is outside the scope of this procedure?

If you consider that you have been treated in an unacceptable manner by the Commissioners and/or Secretariat or have received a level of service which fell short of your expectations you have the right to make a complaint.

You can make your complaint directly to the CSC NI and we will endeavour to resolve the matter to your satisfaction.

There are other avenues for complaint which are not related to a claim of unacceptable treatment or unsatisfactory service. These are likely to be underpinned by specific legislation and will be handled in accordance with other procedures. For example, existing civil servants may make a complaint under the [NICS Code of](#)

[Ethics](#). A member of the public may bring a complaint with regard to information provided under the FOI Act 2000 or the Data Protection Act 2018.

A person may wish to make a complaint if it is considered that Commissioners have failed to comply with their [Equality Scheme](#). These will be handled in accordance with the underpinning legislation and are therefore outside the scope of this policy.

You can find further information and guidance on where to direct different types of complaints in the Flowchart in **Annex A** of this document or on our [website](#).

Commissioners have no remit for handling complaints about recruitment and selection to the NICS. If your complaint relates to recruitment and selection to the NICS, you should follow the NICS complaints procedure in the link provided: irecruit-ext.hrconnect.nigov.net/pages/content.aspx?Page=how-do-i-apply/useful-information/complaints-procedure

5. How will my complaint be dealt with?

In considering complaints about our own service, we will apply and adhere to the NIPSO principles of:

- Start off right;
- Fix it early;
- Focus on what matters;
- Being fair;
- Be honest; and
- Learn and improve.

6. Is there a time limit for making a complaint?

We will do all we can to investigate and respond to your complaint, although we ask that, where possible, it is made within three months of the date on which the issue is alleged to have arisen or that you became aware of the issue.

7. What happens to my complaint?

We will send you an acknowledgement within 3 working days of receipt of your complaint.

Stage 1:

- If your complaint is about your treatment by a member of the CSC NI Secretariat then the Secretary to the Commissioners will investigate your complaint. Should your complaint be about the Secretary to the Commissioners, then the Chairperson will decide if the complaint should be investigated by another senior official or a Commissioner.
- If your complaint is about your treatment by a Commissioner(s) then, depending on the nature of the complaint, the Chairperson will consider the complaint or ask an independent person to investigate. Should your complaint be about the Chairperson, then the Secretary will investigate your complaint or, if the matter cannot be handled internally, the Secretary may seek guidance from the NIO in its role as the sponsoring department.

We aim, where possible, to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction. Where this is not possible, we will provide you with a clear and reasoned response.

We will seek to understand what you are complaining about, the outcome you wish to achieve from making the complaint and whether we can resolve it. If it is not appropriate or possible for us to handle your complaint, we will explain this fully to you and/or signpost you to other relevant procedures or organisations to have your complaint addressed.

We expect to provide an initial response to your complaint within 5 working days of receipt. If that is not possible, we will explain why the timeline has to be extended and when you can expect a response.

Once we have assessed your complaint and taken appropriate action, we will inform you of the outcome and explain the reasons for the decision or the agreed action to resolve the complaint.

If your complaint is made verbally, we will endeavour to provide a written response to your complaint on receipt of your preferred contact method and address.

Stage 2:

If you are not satisfied with the initial response **or** you have not received a response to your complaint within 10 working days and no clear date has been given as to when a response will be issued, you may request that the complaint be escalated to a second stage.

- We will ensure that at stage 2 the complaint is investigated by a different member of staff/Commissioner from the one who dealt with the initial complaint. Given the low number of Commissioners and staff in the organisation, it may be necessary to have the investigation conducted by an external person.
- If your first stage complaint was about the Chairperson and you remain dissatisfied with how the matter was dealt with then you can escalate your concerns to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Where a request is received for a complaint to be escalated to a second stage in relation to matters relating to the CSC NI Secretariat or Commissioners (with the exception of the Chairperson), this will be acknowledged within 3 working days and will include a synopsis of the issues of complaint and your expected outcome as understood by the investigating officer. Where these are not clear, the investigating officer will contact you to discuss them. You will be asked to agree to these to ensure that both you and the investigating officer have a shared understanding of the subject and nature of the complaint.

This investigation will seek to explore the complaint in more depth and establish all the relevant facts with a view to resolving the complaint, where possible. If the complaint cannot be resolved, we will provide a full, objective and proportionate response that represents the final position of the organisation.

We expect to provide an initial response to your complaint within 20 working days of receipt. If that is not possible, we will explain why the timeline has to be extended and when you can expect a response.

Details of the complaint will be recorded on the CSC NI's complaint system and saved for a period of three years. Please see the CSC NI's [Privacy Statement](#) for details of how we will handle your personal data.

8. What if I remain dissatisfied?

Once your complaint has been investigated you will be notified of the decision, which will be regarded as final.

We will acknowledge any further correspondence from you but, unless it raises new issues that we consider to be significant, we will not re-open an investigation nor send further replies.

If you remain dissatisfied with our response you can ask the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman to look at your complaint. NIPSO generally expects complaints to be brought to it within 6 months of receiving correspondence from us informing you that the complaints handling procedure is complete and of your right to refer your complaint to NIPSO.

NIPSO is the final stage for complaints about the majority of public services in Northern Ireland. This includes complaints about us. NIPSO is an independent organisation that investigates complaints. The service provided by NIPSO is free. It is not an advocacy or support service (but there are other organisations who can help you with advocacy or support).

NIPSO will generally ask you to provide details of your complaint and a copy of your final response to your complaint. You can do this online at www.NIPSO.org.uk or call them on Freephone 0800 34 34 24 or contact them at the address below:

The Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman
33 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6HN

9. Learning from complaints

Complaints provide valuable customer feedback. The CSC NI welcomes and values complaints and is committed to developing a culture where every opportunity is taken to learn from complaints, whether the complaint has been upheld or not, about:

- The root cause of the complaint;
- Service user experience and expectations;
- Where the service has fallen short; and
- What improvements are required.

The CSC NI will analyse complaints data/trends and use feedback to inform service improvements and take appropriate action, in a timely manner, to mitigate the risk of recurrence. Actions may take the form of e.g. identifying training needs or introducing changes to systems or processes.

Staff are trained on this Complaints Handling Procedure and complaints performance is monitored on a quarterly reporting basis.

10. Recording and publishing complaints information

The CSC NI will record suitable Complaints data to enable it to fully investigate and respond to a complaint. The data, which may be anonymised as appropriate, will also be used to track themes and trends.

In compliance with the NIPSO Model Complaints Handling Procedure, the CSC NI will publish complaints information, where such exists, in its Annual Report. This information will include:

- Complaint performance statistics;
- Complaint trends and the actions that have been or will be taken to improve services as a result; and
- Lessons learned from complaints.

11. Supporting a Complainant to Make a Complaint

We understand that you may be unable or reluctant to make a complaint yourself. We accept complaints from the representative of a person who is dissatisfied with our service. We can take complaints from a friend, relative or an advocate, if you have given them your written consent to complain on your behalf. You can also seek advice and support from Advice NI. To find out about advisers in your area please visit Advice NI's website at www.adviceni.net

We are committed to making our service easy to use for all members of the community. In line with our statutory equality duties, we will always ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to help you access and use our services. If you have trouble putting your complaint in writing, or want this information in another language or format, such as large font, or Braille, please tell us in person, contact us on 02890 523577, or email us at info@niccommissioners.org

ANNEX A - Complaints Handling Procedure – External flowchart

What is my complaint about?

