



**Civil Service
Commissioners**
for Northern Ireland

How to speak up about an issue

Under the NICS Code of Ethics



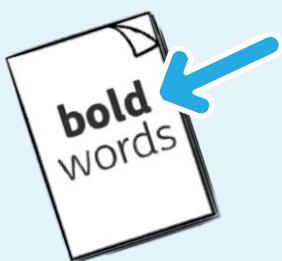
Easy Read



This is an Easy Read version of some information. It may not include all of the information but it will tell you about the important parts.



This Easy Read booklet uses easier words and pictures. Some people may still want help to read it. You can also read the full document for more information.



Some words are in **bold** - this means the writing is thicker and darker. These are important words in the booklet.



Sometimes if a bold word is hard to understand, we will explain what it means.



Blue and underlined words show links to websites and email addresses. You can click on these links on a computer.

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About this booklet



This information is from the Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland.



This booklet is about the **Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS)**. They help the government to do its work.



We help **civil servants** to speak up about issues in the civil service.

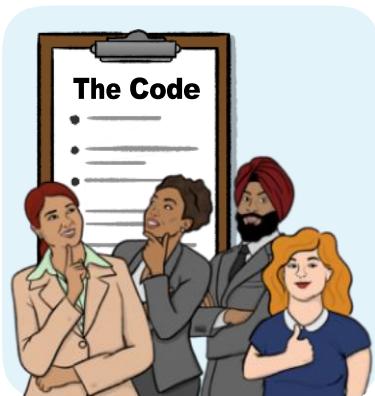


Civil servants are people who work in the civil service.



This information explains how a civil servant can speak up if they are worried something is not fair.

The Code of Ethics



The **NICS Code of Ethics** is a set of rules that explains how civil servants should behave.

In the rest of this booklet, we will call it 'the Code'.



The Code says that civil servants should:

- Be fair and honest.
- Not take sides, and treat everyone fairly.



If a civil servant says another civil servant has not followed the Code, then the civil service must take this seriously.

Speaking up



If you are worried that another civil servant has not followed the Code, you should speak up.

This is called **raising a concern**.



You should do this first in your part of the civil service, called your **department**.



If you do not think that your department has listened to your concern, you should tell us.

Raising a concern in your department



Usually, we only look at your concern if you have already spoken up in your department.



You should normally do this by speaking to your manager, or their manager.



Departments should help you to speak up if a civil servant is not following the Code.



If it is difficult to speak to your manager, you should tell a member of staff called a **Nominated Officer**.



If nobody else can help, you can speak to the people in charge of the civil service.



We look at how many concerns each department deals with each year.



This helps us to check that departments are helping people who speak up.

Coming straight to us



Sometimes, you can come straight to us with a concern.

This might be if:



- Your concern is about someone in charge of your department.



- Your concern is very serious and needs to be dealt with very soon.



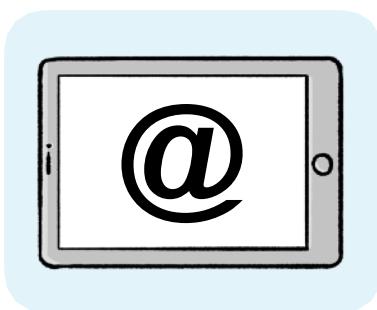
- We think you might be treated unfairly if you speak up in your department.

How to raise a concern

You can speak to us in different ways:



- On our website:
www.nicscommissioners.org



- By email:
info@nicscommissioners.org



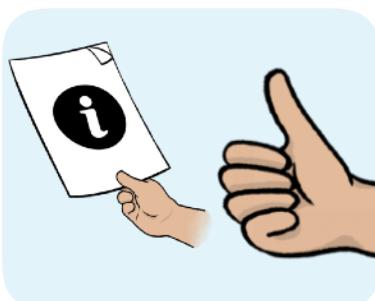
- By post:
Civil Service Commissioners for
Northern Ireland
7th Floor
Erskine House
20 - 32 Chichester Street
Belfast, BT1 4GF



- By phone: 028 9052 3577



We can help you over the phone, but to raise your concern in the first place, you must tell us by post or email.



You will need to agree that we can share information about you when we look at your concern.



We might not be able to look at your concern if we cannot share information.



If you find it hard to raise your concern with us, please talk to us so we can find a way that is easier for you.



You can ask someone else to talk to us for you. But we only look at concerns from civil servants.

What information you should give us



You will need to tell us:

- Your name and that you are a civil servant.



- The department you work for.



- The best way to contact you.

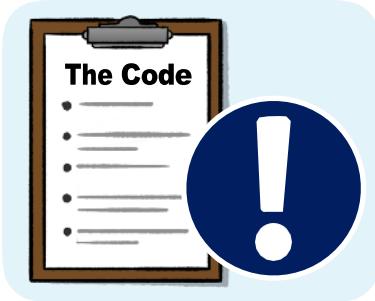


- Your address or email address.



- Your phone number.

You will also need to tell us:



- Why you think someone has broken the Code.



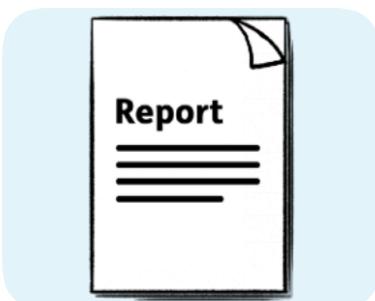
- How your department dealt with your concern.



- How you think we could solve the problem.



You should give us any documents that help to explain this.



You should also give us a letter or report from your department that explains what they did.

After you send us your concern

After you send us your concern, we will:



- Contact you within 3 **working days** to say we have your concern.
Working days means Monday to Friday.



- Try to understand your concern.



- Decide whether to look at your concern. If we decide your concern relates to the NICs Code of Ethics we will accept it as an appeal. This means we will carry out an investigation.

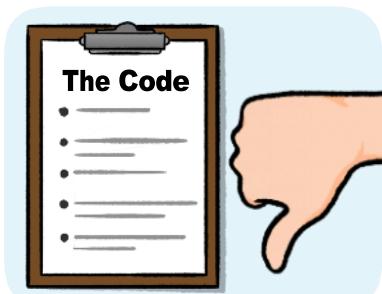
How we choose which concerns to accept as appeals



Only civil servants can raise a concern with us.



Members of the public who have a concern about a civil servant can speak up about it on this website:
www.finance-ni.gov.uk/publications/raising-concern-policy-framework



If a Minister has asked you to do something that does not follow the Code, you should tell your **Permanent Secretary**.



The **Permanent Secretary** is a civil servant who is in charge of your department.



We only look at issues that affect the public.



We do not look at issues that only affect other civil servants.

For example, we would not look at issues like if:



- A manager has not kept staff safe at work.



- A member of staff thinks they did not get a better job because a manager did not like them.

We would probably not look at issues like if:



- A member of staff thinks their manager is not treating them fairly.



- A member of staff feels like they are not being listened to, after saying that their department has made bad decisions in the past.

We would look at issues like if:



- A manager tells a civil servant to hide some information from a Minister, so that the Minister makes the decision that the manager wants.



- A manager tells a member of staff to give government money to a certain company, without following the rules.



- A member of staff knows that another civil servant is using their job to help their family.

Time limits



Time limits mean how long you can wait before raising a concern with us.

You need to tell us about your concern no more than:



- 1 month after your department finished dealing with the issue, or



- 3 months after the issue happened.

Before we look at a concern

Before we look at a concern, we will check that:



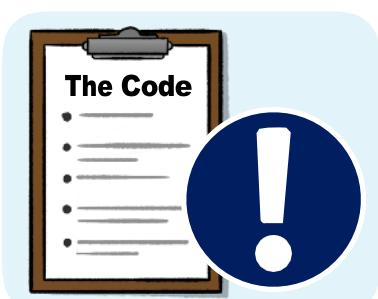
- The person who has brought the concern to us is a civil servant.



- They have already spoken up to staff in their department.



- They have not waited too long before bringing us the concern.



- The concern is about a civil servant who has broken the Code, in a way that affects the public.



We might speak to you about your concern, to help us choose whether to look at it.



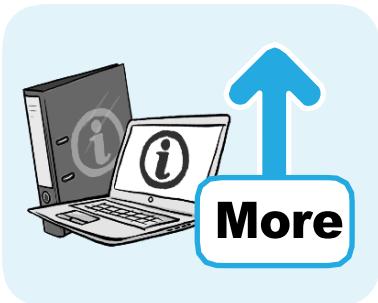
You should not assume that we are looking at your concern unless we have told you that we are.



We will write to you after 20 working days to say if we are going to look at your concern. If so, we will explain that it is now an appeal that we will investigate.



If we decide not to look at your concern, we will tell you why.



We might ask you for more information before we choose whether to look at your concern.

If we look at your concern



If we look at your concern, this is called an appeal. We will carry out an investigation.



Before we start an investigation, we will speak to you to tell you how we will do it.



We will tell the people in charge of your department that we are doing an investigation.



We might ask them for extra information about the issue.

Each investigation is different. But we usually:



- Look at the facts about what happened.



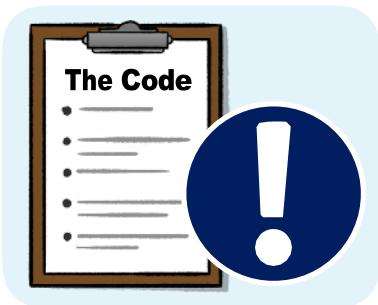
- Talk to you to find out more about what happened.



- Talk to other civil servants from your department.



- Tell you what we think, and ask you and the department if you are happy with this.



- Decide if the Code has been broken.

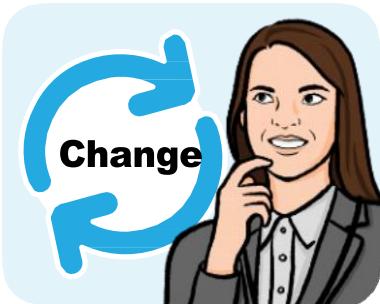


We might ask experts from outside the civil service to help us.



If someone has broken the law, we will tell the police.

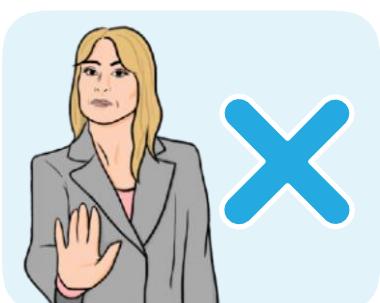
If you change your mind



You can change your mind, and decide that you do not want your concern to be investigated as an appeal after all.



The department might agree to make changes in the future.



But you should not let the department make you feel like you need to stop your appeal.



If you change your mind about your appeal, we will make sure that you are doing this because you really want to.

After your appeal



At the end of the investigation, we might say you are right, and the Code was broken.



We cannot give you money if the Code was broken.



We want to stop the same thing from happening again.

We might say that departments should:



- Change the ways that they work.



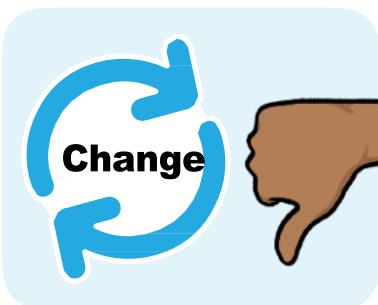
- Give staff more training.



- Say sorry to you.



You and the department have 20 days to check the facts after we have decided what to do.



But after this, you cannot ask us to change our minds.

Unreasonable concerns



We might decide that someone is sending us concerns for the wrong reasons. We call these **unreasonable**.



This might be because we think:

- They are speaking to us too much, and upsetting our staff.



- They are trying to use their concern to cause trouble in their department.



- It would be very difficult for us to do an investigation.



- We have already dealt with the concern.

If the department ignores what we say



Departments do not have to make changes because we tell them to.

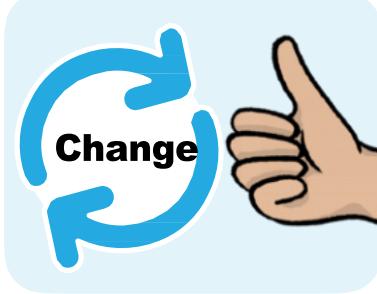


But if departments ignore us, we can:

- Tell the public.



- Tell the government.



Usually departments make changes if we tell them to.



If we think a department is not making changes, we will speak to the people in charge to find out why not.

What happens to you



Departments should help their staff to speak up.



But we know that some civil servants might feel worried about speaking up.



The Code says that you should not be treated badly because you have raised a concern.



It is very serious if you are treated badly because you raised a concern. You should tell us if this happens.

Our report



After we have finished our investigation, we send a report about it to you and your department.



Each year, we write an **annual report**. This explains what we have worked on that year.



The annual report includes information from our investigations. But we will not include your name in this report.



We might also use the report about your appeal to help other departments to improve.



We will not include your name when we do this.

Your privacy



We might need to share some information that you give us.



But we will keep as much information about you private as we can.



We will tell you if we have to share any of your information.

Find out more



You can look at our website here:
www.nicscommissioners.org

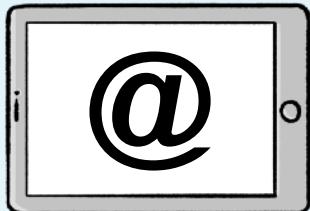


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