

Do you wish to make a
complaint about a public
service provider in
Northern Ireland?



Northern Ireland

Public Services
Ombudsman

We may be able to help you.

This leaflet tells you how to make a complaint
to the Ombudsman about public service providers
in Northern Ireland.

*Our ASSIST team is here to help. If you need advice about
making a complaint to the Ombudsman, please call us on
Freephone 0800 34 34 24*

How can we help you?

We provide a free, independent and impartial service for handling complaints about public service providers in Northern Ireland. These include government departments and agencies, Councils, social housing providers, Health and Social Care Trusts, schools, colleges and universities. You can find a list of the organisations within our remit on our website.

You have the right to complain to the Ombudsman if you feel that a public service provider has treated you unfairly, or you have received a poor service and your complaint to that organisation has not been resolved to your satisfaction. However, you must normally use the organisation's complaints procedure before making a complaint to this Office. If we investigate your complaint and find the organisation has been at fault we can recommend appropriate action.

What can you complain about?

We can consider complaints about maladministration. The term maladministration is not defined but is generally taken to mean poor administration or the wrong application of rules. We can also consider complaints about professional judgement and clinical decisions which have been made by health and social care professionals.

Some examples that we may regard as maladministration include:

- Avoidable delay
- Faulty procedures or failing to follow the correct procedures
- Not telling you about any rights of appeal you have
- Unfairness, bias or prejudice

- Giving advice that is misleading or inadequate
- Refusing to answer reasonable questions
- Discourtesy and failure to apologise properly for errors
- Mistakes in handling your complaint

The above list is not exhaustive.

Is there anything we cannot investigate?

We can only deal with complaints about public service providers.

We would not generally accept your complaint if:

- You have not used the organisation's complaints procedure
- You make your complaint more than 6 months after completing the organisation's complaint procedure
- You could take your case to a tribunal
- You could have gone to court or have already begun legal action
- We believe the action or decision you are complaining about was reasonable
- It is about government policy
- It is about private health care

If you are not sure whether the Ombudsman can deal with your particular complaint, please contact our ASSIST team on Freephone 0800 34 34 24.

How we deal with your complaint

We can decide whether or not to accept a complaint for investigation.

An initial assessment of your complaint will be made to decide if we have the legal authority to investigate your complaint. We use the legislation to help us make this decision. If we cannot accept your complaint, we will inform you of our decision in writing.

If we have the legal authority to investigate your complaint, we will make an assessment to decide if it should be investigated. This assessment involves considering your complaint and the supporting evidence you have presented. We usually seek further information from the organisation you have complained about. We may also ask the organisation about any proposals it may have to resolve the complaint.

When we have gathered sufficient information, we will assess your complaint and decide whether an investigation:

- is appropriate and necessary
- would bring about a solution or adequate remedy
- could be of benefit to the general public

We will write to you to inform you of our decision.

If we decide to investigate, your complaint will be passed to an Investigation Team to establish if the allegations made in the complaint can be substantiated and if there is any maladministration by the organisation you complained about.

We may also decide to publish an anonymised version of the investigation report.

We will obtain further information from the organisation and may also ask you for more information. The investigation may be conducted by correspondence or we may interview those involved in the complaint, this decision is taken on a case by case basis. The purpose of the investigation is to establish if there has been maladministration by the organisation complained about.

Where we find maladministration we will, if appropriate, make recommendations about what should be done to put things right. We do not award compensation or penalise individuals but may recommend an apology and changes in practice to bring about service improvement. We will inform you of the result of the investigation in a letter or report.

How to make a complaint

What should you do first?

You should first put your complaint to the organisation concerned using its complaints procedure.

What should you do next?

If you remain dissatisfied after completing the organisation's complaints procedure you can bring your complaint to us. This should normally be in writing. You can submit a complaint form online from our website. Alternatively you can download the complaint form from our website or use the complaint form provided with this leaflet. Details of our website, email and postal addresses are set out overleaf.

If you have difficulty in submitting your complaint to us in writing, please contact us on Freephone 0800 34 34 24.

How to contact the Ombudsman's Office

You can contact us in the following ways:

Telephone: 028 9023 3821 **or Freephone:** 0800 34 34 24

Text Phone: 028 9089 7789

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Freepost: Freepost NIPSO

or
The Northern Ireland Public Services
Ombudsman
Progressive House
33 Wellington Place
BELFAST
BT1 6HN

or
By calling, between 9.00am & 5.00pm,
Monday to Friday, at the above address.

Please contact us if you would like this form in another language or format (such as large print or Braille)