

Departmental Complaints Policy and Procedure

April 2023

What complaints can the Department deal with?

We can only handle complaints about the work, staff and levels of service provided by the Department of Health. The Departmental complaints email address is: complaints@health-ni.gov.uk

What happens next?

When a complaint has been submitted to the Department we will:

Forward the complaint to the relevant Director and open a container to save all correspondence.

The container will have designated access to only those required to support the investigation/response to the complaint.

The Complaints Process

Informal Procedure

A complainant may bring any matter of concern to the attention of a Departmental official they have been dealing with. However, if they still feel dissatisfied after this approach, they may initiate a formal complaint in writing.

Formal Procedures – Stage 1

A senior manager responsible for the policy area that the complaint is referring to will investigate the complaint. There is a target of 20 working for response. If this time is exceeded the complainant should be advised as soon as reasonably practicable.

The complainant must be advised that they have stage 2 of the complaints process available to them and also advised that if they are unhappy with the response provided to contact NIPSO (details below).

Formal Procedures – Stage 2

The Director of Corporate Management normally investigates stage 2 formal complaints. However if the Director of Corporate Management was involved in the stage 1 formal complaint, the Deputy Secretary, Resource and Corporate Management Group will identify another Senior Officer to hear the stage 2 complaint. There is a target of 20 working days to respond to the complaint.

The complainant will then be advised that all steps in Department's complaints procedures have been exhausted. If they are still unsatisfied with the handling of the complaint they should contact NIPSO within 6 months from the date of the letter of the outcome of the stage 2 complaint.

Making a complaint about Top Management in the Department

Top Management is defined as the Head of the Civil Service, Permanent Secretary and Grade 3 or equivalent levels directly below Permanent Secretary level.

If you wish to make a complaint about Top Management within the Department of Health, the [Top Management Complaints Policy](#) applies, please send to **complaints@health-ni.gov.uk**

Unacceptable Correspondence

This section should be read in conjunction with the [DoH Unacceptable Behaviour Policy](#) and the NICS Dignity at Work policy.

Should correspondence be deemed unacceptable the complainant must be informed, in writing, by a member of the Senior Civil Service (SCS):

- why the decision was taken;
- what action is being taken;
- the duration of that action; and
- the right of the complainant to contact the NIPSO about the fact that they have been treated as a vexatious complainant and/or the nature of the complaint is unacceptable.

Complainants, whose behaviour is considered unreasonable, or unreasonably persistent, are those who because of the nature or frequency of their contact with the Department hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints.

The Department has a duty of care towards staff to ensure that staff can go about their work and/or professional duties without being subject to unacceptable behaviour or harassment. The Department operates a zero tolerance policy towards harassment and abuse of our staff. We aim to manage unacceptable behaviour in a manner that protects our staff wherever it is appropriate and necessary.

It is important to remember that even where a person's conduct may be unreasonable, they could still have a valid complaint and that complaint should be handled appropriately. The key to managing an unreasonable complainant's conduct is to give fair consideration to the complaint.

NIPSO Contact Details

It is good practice to sign post the complainant to NIPSO at the end of the correspondence. NIPSO will have expected them to complete the Departments complaints process in its entirety however this is not an absolute requirement. The complainant must refer to NISPO within 6 months upon receipt of the correspondence.

Freepost NIPSO (Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman)
Progressive House
33 Wellington Place,
Belfast, BT1 6HN

Telephone: 028 9023 3821
Text Phone: 028 9089 7789
Freephone: 0800 34 34 24
Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk
website: www.ni-ombudsman.org.uk

INFORMATION FOR THE PUBLIC – SERVICE PROVIDER COMPLAINTS

Family Practitioner Complaints

The Departments Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) deals with complaints regarding Family Practitioner's (GP's Dentists, Pharmacists, Opticians). These should be sent to **complaints.sppg@hscni.net**

HSC Complaints

Responsibility for dealing with complaints about health and social care services in Northern Ireland is placed with the provider of the service.

If you are unhappy with the care or treatment you receive from the Health and Social Care service in Northern Ireland, you have the right to complain. You will find information on how to make a complaint on the [nidirect website\(external link opens in a new window / tab\)](#).

HSC Complaints - Standards and Guidelines

The following documents provide detailed guidance on the [HSC Complaints Procedure](#)

Contact Details for HSC Trust Complaints:

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Tel: (028) 9504 8000
By email complaints@belfasttrust.hscni.net

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Telephone: 028 9442 4655

Email: user.feedback@northerntrust.hscni.net

Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Phone: (028) 37564600

Email: serviceuserfeedback@southerntrust.hscni.net

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Phone: (028) 9056 1427

Email: complaints@setrust.hscni.net

Western Health and Social Care Trust

Tel: 028 7161 1226

Email: complaints.department@westerntrust.hscni.net

Making a complaint against the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS)

If your complaint is about the NI Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) follow these [procedures\(external link opens in a new window / tab\)](#).