



The  
**Prisoner  
Ombudsman**  
for Northern Ireland

## **Guidance: Unacceptable behaviour by complainants or their representative**

All staff at the Office of the Prisoner Ombudsman have the right to go about their work free from abuse, threats, harassment, or abusive language. We expect our staff to be treated courteously and with respect.

All staff at the Office of the Prisoner Ombudsman are expected to treat complainants, family members and all those in contact with the office, with courtesy, fairness, and respect. Both language and tone should reflect this approach.

All complaints should be dealt with fairly and on their own merits. However, from time to time unreasonable or abusive behaviour is displayed by complainants. Ombudsman staff should consider the circumstances in which such a complainant finds themselves, for example, whether there is any health reason for their behaviour or a particularly stressful situation that may impact their behaviour. A complainant may, in times of stress, behave uncharacteristically and reasonable allowances should be made in such circumstances.

Any threat of violence that causes a member of staff to feel afraid, threatened or abused will cause direct contact with the complainant to be discontinued whether the threat is written, oral or in tone. Contact will only be reinstated at the Ombudsman's discretion.

Complainants should be aware that their behaviour can distress staff causing emotional strain and demanding time and resources in an often challenging environment.

Where behaviour is considered to be unacceptable complainants and others in contact with the office will:

- a. Be told in writing that their behaviour is unacceptable and why
- b. Be given an opportunity to amend such behaviour with a timeline for review

- c. If there is no amendment to such behaviour, complainants or others will receive written notice that contact will be discontinued for a stated period of time
- d. If there is amendment to such behaviour, complainants or others will not have penalty carried forward should their behaviour deteriorate in future.