



Annual Complaints Report

2016 - 2017

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1. Introduction

Complaints are often regarded as a very negative element of customer service – something that will inevitably happen but should be avoided at all costs. Whilst it can be disconcerting and disappointing to receive a complaint when one has tried genuinely to deliver a very high quality service, a complaint can be a positive thing.

It can provide a unique insight into the experience of the service user and give those who design the service a totally different perspective on how services operate, and any issues or difficulties users have with them. So, in those regards, complaints should be welcomed as a great opportunity to design and re-design services that will meet customers' needs and in ways that are accessible and easy to navigate.

In DVA we treat every complaint, as well every compliment we receive, as a genuine opportunity to make our service better, and to iron out any wrinkles in our procedures or services.

We seek to resolve complaints at the first point of contact, informally if possible, but we have a robust procedure should the customer feel the need to make a formal complaint.

In 2016-17 we received 333 formal complaints, 150 informal complaints and, notably, 137 compliments from our customers.

For an Agency that delivered over 1 million vehicle tests, issued 276,000 driving licences, conducted 60,710 driving tests, and handled over 180,000 enquiries, the number of complaints we received in 2016-17 is not significant, in terms of its ratio to the transactions conducted.

This report provides statistical information on the number of complaints we received, our performance in handling those – in terms of timeliness and also our effectiveness in persuading complainants that they did not need to escalate the complaint to the next stage – and an insight into how our many customers perceive our level of service.

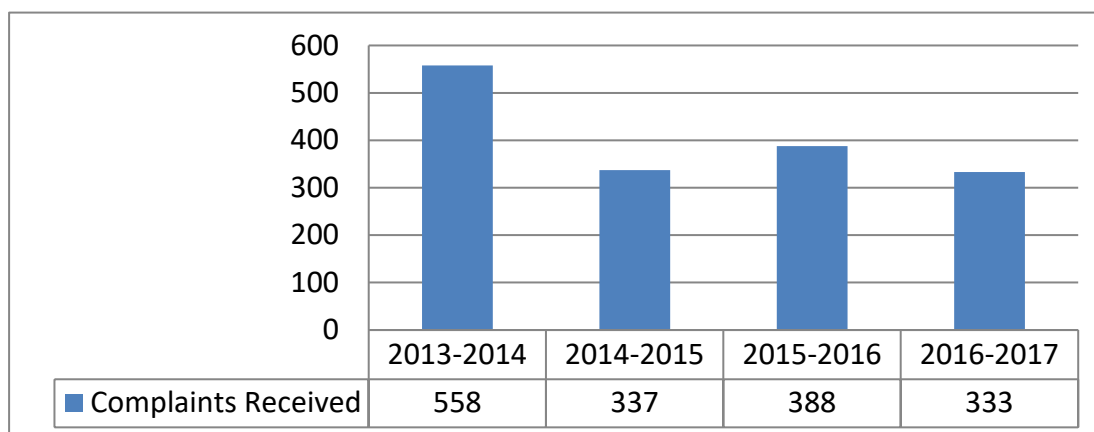
Reports about complaints are discussed at Senior Management level within the Agency on a regular basis.

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an assurance that the Agency operates a robust and accessible complaints procedure when investigating and responding to formal complaints;
- Show evidence that complaints and lessons learned from complaint investigations have been used to improve the quality of service to customers during the year; and
- Provide statistics about the nature of complaints received.

2. Complaints Summary

During this reporting year (April 2016 to March 2017) we received and dealt with a total of 333 formal complaints. This figure represents a decrease of 14.17 % on the previous year (388 complaints received 2015-16).



Complaints Outcomes

Year	Total	Complaints			
		Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Withdrawn
2016-17	333	121 (36.4%)	56 (16.8%)	147 (44.1%)	9 (2.7%)
2015-16	388	115 (29.7%)	40 (10.3%)	224 (57.7%)	9 (2.3%)
2014-15	337	113 (33.5%)	39 (11.6%)	176 (52.2%)	9 (2.7%)
2013-14	558	184 (33%)	53 (9.5%)	321 (57.5%)	0 (0.0%)
2012-13	536	121 (22.6%)	51 (9.5%)	357 (66.6%)	7 (1.3%)

Of the 121 Upheld complaints, 111 complaints were resolved at Stage 1, 9 complaints at Stage 2 and 1 complaint at stage 3. The two main work areas involved are as follows;

- a. 27 of these complaints, equal to 22.3% involved damage to vehicles whilst undergoing MOT tests; and
- b. 42 complaints, equal to 34.7%, were formal complaints about driver licensing services.

3. Performance against Target

Target	Outcome	Actual 2014-2015	Actual 2015-2016	Actual 2016-2017
To respond to 97% of complaints within 10 working days	ACHIEVED	99.7%	99.2%	98.2%

This high level of performance has been achieved by:

- a. a robust complaints procedure; and
- b. an effective Customer Services monitoring role.

4. Complaints Missing Target

A total of 6 complaints failed to meet the target for issuing a response. These are detailed below:

Centre/Office Involved	Total No. Which Missed Target	Reason
Driver Licensing	4	Responses missed Stage 1 target due to a backlog in correspondence due to high volumes received
Londonderry Test Centre	1	Response missed Stage 1 target due to the complaint being received by Customer Services a number of days after the correspondence was date stamped, shortening 10 day response target.
Chief Executive	2	Responses missed Stage 3 target due to a breakdown in communication between the business area involved and the Chief Executive's office.
Total	7	

5. Complaints Breakdown

The table below lists the Business Area where formal complaints were received and a breakdown of the reasons for 2016-17 formal Complaints can be found at Appendix 9.

Section	Total	2015-16
Test Centre	161	195
Driver Licensing	119	89
BSP Booking Services	19	46
Enquiries	16	17
Theory Test	6	20
PTLD	5	
Compliance and Enforcement	5	
ADI/AMI	1	
Other	1	21
TOTAL	333	388

The most notable increase in complaints was in relation to the Driver Licensing. There was a 33.7% rise from 89 complaints in 2015-16 to 119 complaints in 2016-17. 63% of these complaints were in relation to the delay in receiving licences.

N.B. The Driver Licensing team confirmed that the fall in performance could be primarily attributed to issues associated with the introduction of a new Driver Licensing IT system in November 2016.

Complaints as a percentage of transactions

Enquiries - During this reporting cycle the total number of calls answered by the Agency Enquiries team was 161,445, and the total number of emails responded to by Enquiries was 22,322. This gives a total of 183,767 Enquiries transactions. The 16 complaints received regarding Enquiries equates to 0.009% of customer interactions (i.e. 1 per 10,276).

Driver Licensing - The total number of driver licences issued during this reporting cycle was 276,000. The 119 driving licence complaints received equates to 0.043 % of transactions processed. This represents 1 complaint per 2,319 transactions, down from 1 per 3,318 last year. 58 of the complaints received in relation to Driver Licensing were about the delay in receiving the relevant service. These delays came about as a result of the introduction of a new Driver Licensing IT system. Had these delays not occurred, Driver Licensing would, arguably, have received considerably fewer complaints than in 2015-16 (i.e. 61 as compared to 119.)

Vehicle Testing - The total number of vehicle test appointments provided during this reporting cycle was 1,051,409. The 105 complaints attributable to vehicle tests equate to 0.009% of tests conducted (i.e. 1 per 10,013). This represents a significant improvement on the performance of vehicle testing last year, when the complaints figure was 1 per 5,720 vehicle appointments.

Driver Testing - The total number of driving test appointments provided during this reporting cycle was 60,710. The 51 complaints relating to driving tests equates to 0.084% of tests conducted (i.e. 1 per 1190), an improvement on 1 per 837 appointments in 2015-16.

Compliance and Enforcement - Given the nature of the work conducted by Compliance and Enforcement, it is not a simple process to calculate the number of transactions it undertook. However, the total number of complaints received in respect of our Compliance and Enforcement work was 5, compared with 8 in 2015-16.

A detailed analysis of complaints, broken down by business area, can be found in appendices 1 - 8.

6. Complaints Procedure

We operate a three stage complaints procedure.

The objective is to deal as thoroughly as possible with the complaint at Stage One, and thereby minimise the customer's perceived need to take it any further. This, of course, is not always possible.

If a complainant has made a formal complaint and is not satisfied with the response at Stage One, he may request that it be escalated to Stage Two.

If the complainant is still not satisfied with the response at Stage Two, he may again request that it be escalated to stage 3¹. At this stage, the response must be signed off by the Chief Executive.

Should, the complainant remain unhappy, after the three stages of the Complaints Procedure have been used, he may take the matter to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.

In 2016-17, of the 333 complaints received, 9 (2.7%) were withdrawn. Of the remaining 324 complaints, 284 (87.7%) complaints were completed at Stage One, 28 (8.6%) complaints were completed at Stage Two, with the remaining 8 (2.5%) being completed at Stage Three. Four cases (1.2%) were referred to the Ombudsman.

¹ We took advice from the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman's Office about the escalation process. Their advice was that the complaints procedure is an appeals process in its own right. This means that the complainant need only express dissatisfaction with the response, and does not have to produce new evidence for the complaint to move to the next stage.

Breakdown of Complaints Escalated to Stage Two

Nature of Complaint	Total
Attitude of Staff	10
Length of Time to Produce a License/ Errors on License/ Loss of	6
Test Outcome	8
Customer Service/ Queuing Times/ Efficiency of Response / Waiting	2
Administration Procedures / Legislation	2
Other	12
Total	40

Of those complaints escalated to Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure, 9 (32.14%) were Upheld.

Breakdown of Complaints Escalated to Stage Three

Nature of Complaint	Total
Test Outcome	4
Administration Procedures / Legislation	2
Attitude of Staff	2
Other	4
Total	12

Of those complaints escalated to Stage 3 of the Complaints Procedure, 1 (8.33%) was Upheld. Upon closer analysis of the complaints that progressed to Stage 2 and 3 we found no correlation between the nature of the complaint and the outcome of the complaint.

7. Complaints to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

During this reporting cycle four complaints were escalated to the Ombudsman. A decision has been made by the Ombudsman not to accept 2 of these, whilst the other 2 remain under investigation.

1. Test Centre

The customer had made a verbal complaint which was dealt with by the centre manager. The response given was not satisfactory for the customer and a Complaints Procedure leaflet was posted to the customer.

The customer submitted a written complaint which should have been a Stage 2 in relation to the earlier Stage 1 verbal complaint. The written complaint had a second complaint regarding insufficient postage for the Complaints Procedure Leaflet; this was dealt with in the reply and not logged as a separate Stage 1 complaint which was the customer's intention.

An assessment of the complaint has been completed by the Ombudsman and a decision has been made to not accept the complaint for investigation at this time.

2. Test Centre

The customer was unhappy with the decision of a vehicle test and the attitude of the examiner. In particular, the unavailability of a same day re-test appointment at the same centre and having to pay a re-test fee for a brief examination of a replaced tyre at another centre.

An assessment of the complaint has been completed by the Ombudsman's Office and a decision has been made to not accept the complaint for investigation at this time.

3. Test Centre

The customer was unhappy with the decision of a driving test and the attitude of the examiner. The customer did not agree with the faults recorded and attributed them to the examiner's bias and discrimination.

To date the Ombudsman has not completed a full assessment.

4. Theory Test

The customer was unhappy with the length of time to get an appointment at the Belfast and Ballymena theory test centres.

To date the Ombudsman has not completed a full assessment.

8. Customer Feedback

We conducted a small survey to evaluate the effectiveness of our complaints process, from the perspective of those who had used it. We issued surveys to both those who had an Upheld and Not Upheld outcome.

Of the 333 complaints received, 76 surveys were issued, representing a 22.82% sample. Of these surveys 26, (34.21%) were returned.

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied Nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Total
The way the complaint was handled.	7	3	3	2	11	26
Someone taking responsibility for sorting out your complaint.	7	5	2	2	10	26
The time taken to sort out your complaint.	6	3	7	3	7	26
The follow up contact you received.	7	5	9	2	3	26
The clarity of the response.	8	4	4	2	8	26
The eventual outcome of your complaint.	9	1	1	3	12	26
Overall Result	28.21%	13.46%	16.67%	8.97%	32.69%	

We have looked at the nature of the initial complaints raised by these respondents and there is a correlation between the outcome of the complaint and the level of satisfaction. Those that indicated very dissatisfied in the majority of responses had an outcome of partially upheld or not upheld.

After reviewing the complainants' suggestions for improvement, it was noted that most of these related to the outcome of their complaint and not the complaint process itself.

9. Improvements

Our complaints process challenges us to learn from the complaints received, identify areas where repeated problems are occurring and take steps to improve our service.

In 2016-17 the following improvement was implemented:

Issue	Suggestion for Improvement	Progress
<p>Low number of responses to the Annual Complaints Follow Up Survey.</p>	<p>The survey should be issued quarterly.</p>	<p>The survey was issued quarterly. Surveys were issued to 20-25% of customers who contacted DVA with a complaint during the previous quarter. The percentage issued changes as we use an equal number of Licensing and Testing complaints.</p> <p>An online consultation tool replaced the paper survey and also had a positive impact. See below for comparison information.</p>

Comparison of Annual Postal Survey against Quarterly Online Survey

Date Range	Frequency of Survey	Version	Method of Contact	No. Of Complaints Received	% of Complaints Used	No. of Surveys Issued	Number of Returns	% Returns
2015 /16								
01/04/15 – 31/03/16	Annually	Paper	Post and email	388	25.77	100	3	3
2016/17								
01/04/16-30/06/16	Quarterly	Paper	Post and email	87	22.98 Initial contact- 9 Post 11 email	20	2 Initial contact- 1 Post 1 email	10
01/07/16-30/09/16	Quarterly	Online	Post and email	55	25.45 Initial contact- 6 Post 8 email	14	5 Initial contact- 1 Post 4 email	35
01/10/16-31/12/16	Quarterly	Online	Email	63	25.39	16	7	43.75
01/01/17-31/03/17	Quarterly	Online	Email	128	20.63	26	12	46.15
2016 / 2017 Overall Totals				333	22.82	76	26	34.21

N.B. The number of complaints used changes every quarter, as an equal number of Driver and Testing complaints are used.

10. Informal Complaints

An informal complaint can be described as an expression of dissatisfaction from a customer, which he chooses to raise at the point of service, but not formally in writing. These are generally handled on the spot by a manager.

In 2016-17, 150 informal complaints were received. This is an 18.9% decrease from the previous year.

The 3 main reasons for informal complaints were 'Decision of Test', which attracted 81 complaints (54%), 'Attitude of Examiner' which attracted 28 complaints (18.66%) and 'Test Procedure' which attracted 24 complaints (16.%). The number of informal complaints received by Test Centre can be found at Section 14, whilst a detailed breakdown of the 2016-17 informal complaints can be found at Appendix 10.

11. Compensation Payments

There are a number of instances where it is necessary for the Agency to pay compensation to customers.

Ex-gratia Payments

Occasionally DVA will make ex-gratia payments to customers. These are payments made when there is no obligation or liability to make this payment, but are made as a gesture of goodwill. In this reporting period there were 7 ex-gratia payments, with a total associated cost of £271.93. This was a decrease of 12 payments and £346.24 on the 2015-16 numbers.

Reason	Total
Postage Costs	3
Replacement of lost documents	2
Telephone Calls	1
Retest and Hire of bus	1
Total	7

Tests Cancelled by Agency

If a vehicle or driving test is cancelled by the Agency for any reason within the Agency's control and the period of notification is less than the stipulated period of 1 clear working day for vehicle tests and 3 clear working days for driving tests, the customer is refunded 50% of their test fee and receives a rescheduled appointment.

During the 2016-17 year, 125 Driving Tests and 622 Vehicle Tests were cancelled. This is a decrease of 23.4% on the 2015-16 cancelled tests total.

These cancelled tests resulted in compensation payments totaling **£15,092.90**

The 622 cancelled Vehicle Tests equates to 0.059 % of tests conducted (i.e. 1 in 1690 tests).

The 125 cancelled Driving Tests, equates to 0.205 % of tests conducted (i.e. 1 in 485 tests).

A full breakdown of 2016-17 Cancelled tests by Test Centre can be found at section 14 and the reasons for cancellation can be found in Appendices 11 and 12.

Damage to Vehicles

If damage is caused to a customer's vehicle and the Agency is found to be negligent, compensation may be applicable.

For 2016-17, 31 incidents of damage to vehicles were received and 29 were upheld. This is a decrease of 3.125 % on the number of incidents reported during the 2015-16 year.

The total cost to the Agency of £45,037.82.

The 29 incidents of damage to vehicles that were upheld equates to 0.002% of vehicles tests conducted (i.e. 1 in 36,255 vehicles tests.)

The table below lists the reasons for damage caused to vehicles in 2016-17.

Reason	2016-17 Reporting Year
Vehicle damaged when being jacked / lifted	8
Collision with testing equipment	3
Broken handbrake	3
Damage to Tachograph Head	2
Other	15
TOTAL	31

12. Compliments received from customers

Section	Total
Test Centres	93
Enquiries	25
Driver Licensing	14
PLTD	4
Customer Services	1
TOTAL	137

13. Lessons Learned

In recent times our complaints procedure has been comprehensively reviewed and indeed commended as good practice, following an independent review as part of our Customer Service Excellence[®] assessment. We have also liaised with the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman to ensure that we follow good practice guidance in handling complaints.

Our procedures are at an advanced stage of maturity, having been reviewed and benchmarked consistently over recent years.

In statistical terms, the volume of complaints received, whilst never acceptable, is not unreasonable, nor is it a major cause of concern, given the nature of our work, and the volume of transactions we have with customers.

Nevertheless, we conducted an internal review of the quality of our handling of stage 1 complaints in early 2016.

Having identified a number of common issues arising in our responses to complaints, the Customer Services team conducted a Complaints Workshop with Test Centre Managers, who are also Complaints Managers. During the workshop we provided some guidance (in the form of a checklist) to help them prepare and write responses to stage 1 complaints.

The checklist addressed the issues we had identified and provided good practice guidance.

In an effort to support these managers in the handling of complaints, and to provide a fresh perspective on the draft responses, before they are issued, we offered our services to consider their drafts and to provide some support to help them finalise the replies.

An online consultation tool replaced the Annual Complaints Follow Up paper survey and had a positive impact. The 2015-16 return rate of 3% increased to a 34.21% return rate in 2016-17.

14. At a Glance Guide for Test Centres

Test Centre	Tests conducted ³	Formal Complaints	Informal Complaints	Compliments received	Incidents of vehicle damage	Compensation Payments	Vehicle Tests Cancelled	Driving Tests Cancelled	Other Payments
Armagh	50,568	2	4	7	1	18	10	7	0
Ballymena	82,714	14	10	3	3	285	262	19	1
Belfast	118,359	32	9	4	2	8	5	1	1
Coleraine	71,727	12	10	2	1	15	0	11	3
Cookstown	70,589	13	6	10	5	62	39	15	3
Craigavon	76,012	10	11	15	1	21	0	20	0
Downpatrick	45,743	3	3	2	1	4	0	2	1
Enniskillen	50,622	3	10	1	1	36	23	12	0
Larne	49,672	11	16	1	0	36	23	12	1
Lisburn	72,282	10	10	28	5	10	4	1	0
Londonderry	84,189	12	17	1	0	42	39	3	0
Mallusk	84,694	10	12	2	2	67	62	3	0
Newry	83,193	6	15	13	3	105	83	19	0
Newtownards	121,733	18	9	4	4	4	0	0	0
Omagh	50,022	5	8	0	0	73	72	0	1

³ Vehicle and driving tests

15. APPENDICES - Detailed breakdown of complaints by Business Area

Appendix 1 – Driver Licensing

Section	2016 - 2017 Reporting Year
Correspondence Team	76
Medicals / Vocational	30
Foreign Licence	5
Data Input / Cash	3
Tachos	2
Court Section	2
Post Team	1
TOTAL	119

Drivers - Correspondence Team

Length of Time Taken to Issue Licence	31
Customer Service	11
Errors on Licence	9
Ex-gratia / Loss of Documents	9
Accuracy of Records	5
Other	11
TOTAL	76

Drivers - Medicals Vocational

Length of Time to Produce a Licence	22
Administration Procedures / Policy	3
Other	5
TOTAL	30

Post Team

Lost Documents	1
TOTAL	1

Drivers - Data Input / Cash

Errors on Licence	2
Insufficient Advice	1
TOTAL	3

Drivers - Court Section

Length of Time to Produce a Licence	2
TOTAL	2

Drivers - Foreign Licence

Errors on Licence	2
Length of Time to Produce a Licence	2
Ex-gratia / Loss of Documents	1
TOTAL	5

Drivers - Tachos

Length of Time to Produce a Licence	1
Loss of Documents	1
TOTAL	2

Appendix 2 – Test Centres (including main reasons for complaints)

Centre	2016 - 2017 Reporting Year	Test outcome	Damage to vehicle	Attitude of staff
Armagh	2	1	1	0
Ballymena	14	6	4	2
Belfast	32	11	2	10
Coleraine	12	2	3	4
Cookstown	13	3	5	2
Craigavon	10	4	1	3
Downpatrick	3	1	1	0
Enniskillen	3	1	1	1
Larne	11	5	0	1
Lisburn	10	4	5	0
Londonderry	12	4	0	0
Mallusk	10	4	2	2
Newry	6	1	3	1
Newtownards	18	8	3	3
Omagh	5	3	0	0
TOTAL	161	58	31	29

Appendix 3 – Booking Services

Breakdown	
Testing	14
Website	2
Legislation	1
Administration Procedures	1
Queueing Times	1
TOTAL	19

Appendix 4 – Telephone Enquiries

Breakdown	
Attitude/ Conduct of Staff	4
Queuing Time	3
Speed of Response & Efficiency	3
Customer Service	3
Other	3
TOTAL	16

Appendix 5 – Compliance & Enforcement

Breakdown	
Attitude/ Conduct of Staff	4
Admin Procedures and Policy	1
TOTAL	5

Appendix 6 – Theory Testing

Breakdown	
Test Outcome	4
Booking difficulties	1
Test Procedure	1
TOTAL	6

Appendix 7 – ADI / AMI

Breakdown	
Attitude of Staff	1
TOTAL	1

Appendix 8 – Operators – Passenger Service

Breakdown	
Admin Procedures and Policy	1
Length of time to process application	4
TOTAL	5

Appendix 9 – Breakdown of Formal Complaints across DVA

Reason	Complaints
Loss of Documents / Error on Licence / Length of Time to Produce a Licence	91
Decision of Test	57
Attitude/Conduct of staff	46
Customer Service / Speed of Response /Quality of Advice/ Service Provided	33
Damage Caused During Test	31
Maladministration/ Administration Procedures/ Policy / Legislation	19
Booking Systems/ Process/ System Limitations	16
Other	40
Total	333

Appendix 10 – Breakdown of Informal Complaints

Reason	Complaints
Test Outcome	81
Attitude of Examiner or Staff/ Customer Service / Conduct of Test	28
Procedures / Policy / Legislation	24
Other	17
Total	150

Appendix 11 – Vehicle Test Cancellations

Reason	2016-2017 Reporting Year
Power Failure	254
System failure / fault	192
Brake Testing Equipment / Brake rollers failure	71
Server / BSP failure	45
Other	56
Total	618

Appendix 12 – Driving Test Cancellations

Reason	2016-2017 Reporting Year
Examiner Not Available / Examiner Illness	121
Other	4
Total	125

Appendix 13 – Damage to Vehicles by Centre

Centre	Number of Incidents	Total Cost
Armagh	1	£ 220.00
Ballymena	4	£ 1156.44
Belfast	2	£ 1277.64
Coleraine	3	£ 304.00
Cookstown	5	£ 33579.16
Craigavon	1	£ 528.00
Downpatrick	1	£ 374.11
Enniskillen	1	£ 252.00
Lisburn	5	£ 1930.72
Mallusk	2	£ 375.49
Newry	3	£ 4396.99
Newtownards	3	£ 643.27
Total	31	£ 45037.82