



Annual Complaints Report

2017 - 2018



Safer Drivers, Safer Vehicles



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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 2017-18 we received 306 formal complaints, 169 informal complaints and 105 compliments from our customers.

For an Agency that delivered over 1 million vehicle tests, issued 314,426 driving licences, conducted 57,628 driving tests, and handled over 210,000 enquiries, the number of complaints we received in 2017-18 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.

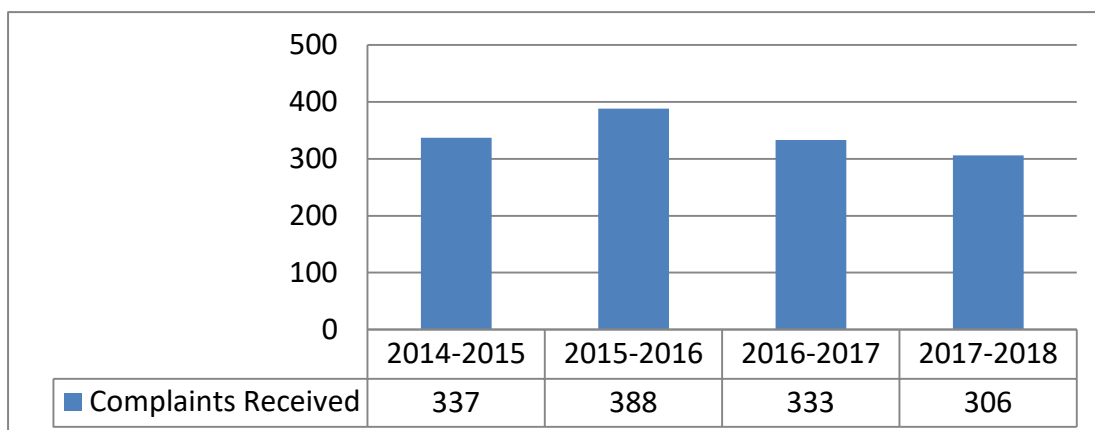
Reports about complaints are discussed at Senior Management level within the Agency on a regular basis.

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 2017 to March 2018) we received, and dealt with, a total of 306 formal complaints. This figure represents a decrease of 8.1 % on the previous year (333 complaints received 2016-17).



Complaints Outcomes

Year	Total	Complaints			
		Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Withdrawn
2017-18	306	86 (28.1%)	67 (21.9%)	143 (46.7%)	10 (3.3%)
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%)

Of the 86 Upheld complaints, 76 complaints were resolved at Stage 1, 6 at Stage 2 and 4 at stage 3. The two main work areas involved are as follows:

- a. 39 of these complaints were related to vehicle testing transactions at Test Centres, equal to 45.3%; and
- b. 36 complaints, equal to 41.9%, were formal complaints about driver licensing services.

3. Performance against Target

Target	Outcome	Actual 2015-2016	Actual 2016-2017	Actual 2017-2018
To respond to 97% of complaints within 10 working days	ACHIEVED	99.2%	98.2%	98.36%

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 5 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	3	One response missed Stage 1 target due to amendment. Two responses missed target due to late arrival in Customer Services.
Omagh Test Centre	1	Response missed Stage 1 target due to late receipt and staff being off shift. Manager was unable to discuss the complaint and it was too late to issue a holding reply.
BSP Call Centre	1	Responses missed Stage 1 target as it required investigation by Capita and DfI Information Management Unit.
Total	5	

5. Complaints Breakdown

The table below lists the Business Areas where formal complaints were received and a breakdown of the reasons for 2017-18 formal Complaints can be found at Appendix 8.

Section	Total	2016-17
Test Centre	119	161
Driver Licensing	122	119
BSP Booking Services	30	19
DVA Enquiries	6	16
Theory Test	10	6
PTLD	10	5
Compliance and Enforcement	8	5
ADI/AMI		1
Other	1	1
TOTAL	306	333

The most notable increase in complaints was in relation to the BSP Booking Services. There was a 57.89% rise from 19 complaints in 2016-17 to 30 complaints in 2017-18. 33.3% of all complaints received in the reporting period were in relation to the removal of the MOT booking telephone number on the MOT reminder letter.

Also noteworthy is the fact that there was a 26% decrease in the number of complaints received in Test Centres.

Complaints as a percentage of transactions

Enquiries - During this reporting period the Agency Enquiries team handled over 210,000 calls. The complaints received about Enquiries equates to 0.003% of customer interactions (i.e. 1 per 34,899 calls.)

Driver Licensing - The total number of driver licences issued during this reporting cycle was 314,426. The 122 driver licensing complaints received equates to 0.038 % of transactions processed. This represents 1 complaint per 2,577 transactions, an improvement on the figure of 1 per 2,319 last year.

78 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. 21 of these complaints relate to medical licences referred to OHS for consideration and final decision. Unfortunately this is beyond the control of the DVA.

Vehicle Testing - The total number of vehicle test appointments provided during this reporting cycle was 1,072,013. The 118 complaints attributable to vehicle testing equates to 0.011% of tests conducted. This represents 1 complaint per 9,084 vehicle appointments, slightly down on the performance of vehicle testing last year, when the complaints figure was 1 per 10,013 vehicle appointments.

Driver Testing - The total number of driving test appointments provided during this reporting cycle was 57,628. The 37 complaints relating to driver testing equates to 0.064% of tests conducted (i.e. 1 per 1557), an improvement on 1 per 1190 appointments in 2016-17.

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 8, compared with 5 in 2016-17.

A detailed analysis of complaints, broken down by business area, can be found in appendices 1 - 7.

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 3. 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 2017-18, of the 306 complaints received, 10 (3%) were withdrawn. Of the remaining 296 complaints, 252 (85%) complaints were completed at Stage One, 23 (8%) complaints were completed at Stage Two, with the remaining 21 (7.0%) being completed at Stage Three. Two cases (0.6%) were referred to the Ombudsman.

Breakdown of Complaints Escalated to Stage Two

Nature of Complaint	Total
Test Outcome	14
Maladministration/Errors on License/ License Delay	8
Attitude of Examiner / Staff	7
Other	15
Total	44

Of those complaints escalated to Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure, 8 (18.18%) were Upheld.

Breakdown of Complaints Escalated to Stage Three

Nature of Complaint	Total
Test Outcome	7
Attitude of Staff	7
Maladministration	2
Other	5
Total	21

Of those complaints escalated to Stage 3 of the Complaints Procedure, 4 (19.04 %) were 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 two complaints were escalated to the Ombudsman. A decision has been made by the Ombudsman not to accept these cases and no further action is to be taken.

1. Testing

The customer submitted a complaint and claim for loss and damages to a Test Centre. The customer was unhappy with the decision of the first vehicle test and the instruction to replace parts on the vehicle. The customer claimed that the vehicle was then presented to another Test Centre for testing and passed without any of the instructed work being carried out.

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.

2. Testing

The customer submitted a complaint about the order in which vehicles are taken into a test hall and the attitude of staff when he spoke to them about this.

The customer was unhappy that a vehicle with an appointment time scheduled after his appointment was taken before him, even though he had arrived 10 minutes prior to his test, as recommended on the booking confirmation. The customer was dissatisfied with the attitude of the Examiner and the Test Centre Manager when he tried to address the matter before and after the vehicle test.

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.

8. Customer Feedback

We conducted a small survey to evaluate the effectiveness of our Complaints Procedure, 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 296 complaints taken forward, 81 surveys were issued, representing a 27.36% sample.

Of these surveys, 30 (37.04%) were returned.

14 respondents (46.66%) found out about the DVA Complaints Procedure on the Department’s Website, 5 (16.67%) on NI Direct, 4 (13.33%) by other means, 3 (10%) from the Test Centre, 2 (6.67%) by telephone when contacting the DVA and 2 (6.67%) by email when contacting the DVA.

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Total
The way the complaint was handled.	7	1	3	8	11	30
Someone taking responsibility for sorting out your complaint.	10	3	2	5	10	30
The time taken to sort out your complaint.	5	2	6	6	11	30
The follow up contact you received.	5	5	7	5	8	30
The clarity of the response.	8	3	4	3	12	30
The eventual outcome of your complaint.	6	6	3	1	14	30
Overall Result	22.78%	11.11%	13.89%	15.55%	36.67%	

We have looked at the nature of the initial complaints raised by these respondents and there is a clear correlation between the outcome of the complaint and the level of satisfaction expressed by the respondent. The majority of those that indicated that they were very dissatisfied 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 or avoidable problems are occurring and take steps to improve our service.

In 2017 – 18 the following improvement was implemented:

Issue	Suggestion for Improvement	Progress
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Work pressures for Driver Licensing staff</u></p> <p>As previously mentioned, during the introduction of the RDS there were quite a lot of complaints regarding the time taken to issue licences. This led to staff having to answer queries both by letter and by completing telephone pro-formas. This led to slower processing times increasing and thus creating a vicious circle.</p>	<p>Customer Services staff met with Driver Licensing staff to discuss the issue. Customer Services suggested a temporary suspension of normal procedures and agreed that Driver Licensing staff could phone the customer and instead of completing the pro-forma a simple email message to Customer Services, outlining the nature of the complaint, was agreed.</p>	<p>This process worked very well and over several months this cut down dramatically on time spent by staff dealing with the complaints.</p> <p>Once the backlog had been reduced, Licensing section went back to the normal arrangements and the normal pro-forma process was re-introduced.</p>

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 2017-18, 169 informal complaints were received. This is a 12.66% increase from the previous year.

The 3 main reasons for informal complaints were 'Decision of Test', which attracted 84 complaints (49.7%), 'Attitude of Examiner' which attracted 35 complaints (20.7%) and 'Damage caused during Test' which attracted 12 complaints (7.1%). The number of informal complaints received by Test Centre can be found at Section 14, whilst a detailed breakdown of the 2017-18 informal complaints can be found at Appendix 9.

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 24 ex-gratia payments, with a total associated cost of £1730.66. This was a significant increase of 17 payments and £1458.73 on the 2016-17 numbers.

Reason	Total
Replacement of lost documents	11
Error on record	5
Postage Costs	4
Delay	3
Other	1
Total	24

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 respectively, the customer is refunded 50% of their test fee and receives a rescheduled appointment.

During the 2017-18 year, 51 Driving Tests and 158 Vehicle Tests were cancelled. This is a decrease of 72.02% on the 2016-17 cancelled tests total.

These cancelled tests resulted in compensation payments totaling **£4,649.00**.

The 158 cancelled Vehicle Tests equates to 0.015 % of tests conducted (i.e. 1 in 6784 tests).

The 51 cancelled Driving Tests, equates to 0.088 % of tests conducted (i.e. 1 in 1129 tests).

A full breakdown of 2017-18 Cancelled tests by Test Centre can be found at section 14 and the reasons for cancellation can be found in Appendices 10 and 11.

Damage to Vehicles

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

In 2017-18, 24 claims for (or "reported incidents" of) damage to vehicles were received and 22 were upheld. This is a decrease of 24.13 % on the number of incidents reported during the 2016-17 year. Payment in respect of damage caused in 20 of these incidents was made during the 2017-18 reporting year along with payment for 5 incidents reported in 2016-17.

The total cost to the Agency was £25,251.51.

The 22 incidents of damage to vehicles for which the claims were upheld equate to 0.002% of vehicles tests conducted (i.e. 1 in 48,727 vehicles tests.)

The table below lists the reasons for damage caused to vehicles in 2017-18.

Reason	2017-18 Reporting Year
Damage to plastic guard	3
Damage to bonnet	2
Damage to bumper	2
Damage to door	2
Other	13
TOTAL	22

12. Compliments received from customers

It is noteworthy that some 105 customers took the time and made the effort to compliment DVA staff, or thank them in writing for the service which was provided. It is important to recognise that whilst we need to have an effective complaints mechanism and to do our utmost to resolve customer complaints, and we do, there are many, many customers who have very good experiences when dealing with DVA. And it reassures our staff that the vast majority of our customers are very satisfied with the service we provide, as further illustrated by our customer satisfaction ratings.

Section	Total
Test Centres	56
Enquiries	22
Driver Licensing	20
Customer Services	6
PTLD	1
TOTAL	105

13. Lessons Learned

Our complaints procedure and the processes around it are now at a mature stage of operation.

We continue to use an online survey to assess customers' perception of their complaints experience. The 2016-17 return rate of 34.21% increased to a 37.04% return rate in 2017-18. This provides useful feedback on which we act, when appropriate and possible.

A valuable lesson learned this past year has been the need for the complaints system and its administrators to be flexible. During times of extreme pressure there should be a mechanism that can be deployed by the Customer Services staff and the Business Area that will meet the needs of both the organisation and the complainant. The mechanism should allow the answering and recording of the response without putting more pressure on the already busy business area. A good example of this in action is described at Section 9 of the report.

We will continue to be flexible, ensuring effective complaints management, whilst seeking to accommodate business areas when under pressure.

14. At a Glance Guide for Test Centres

Test Centre	Tests conducted ³	Formal Complaints	Informal Complaints	Compliments received	Upheld Incidents of vehicle damage	Compensation Payments	Vehicle Tests Cancelled	Driving Tests Cancelled	Other Payments
Armagh	49,053	4	9	2	1	6	4	0	0
Ballymena	83,815	8	13	0	1	15	12	0	2
Belfast	120,022	19	8	7	2	4	0	0	2
Coleraine	73,210	13	12	2	2	80	75	3	0
Cookstown	74,151	8	11	0	1	22	8	13	0
Craigavon	79,558	7	5	9	2	4	0	2	0
Downpatrick	48,268	1	0	6	0	5	5	0	0
Enniskillen	52,079	4	15	0	0	2	1	0	1
Larne	50,702	6	19	1	2	40	38	0	1
Lisburn	76,136	10	11	6	1	11	0	10	0
Londonderry	83,227	13	14	0	1	14	8	4	1
Mallusk	84,351	5	15	3	3	3	0	0	0
Newry	83,118	6	12	10	2	20	0	18	0
Newtownards	122,961	10	8	10	4	6	0	1	1
Omagh	48,990	5	17	0	0	8	7	0	1

³ Vehicle and driving tests

15. APPENDICES - Detailed breakdown of complaints by Business Area

Appendix 1 – Driver Licensing

Section	2017 - 2018 Reporting Year
Correspondence Team	80
Medicals / Vocational	25
Data Input / Cash	4
Court Section	4
Foreign Licence	3
Tachos	2
Scanning Production	2
Post Team	2
TOTAL	122

Drivers - Correspondence Team

Length of Time Taken to Issue Licence	48
Errors on Licence	7
Ex-gratia / Loss of Documents	7
Customer Service	5
Speed of Response and Efficiency	4
Other	9
TOTAL	80

Drivers - Medicals Vocational

Length of Time to Produce a Licence	21
Other	4
TOTAL	25

Drivers - Data Input / Cash

Errors on Licence	2
Other	2
TOTAL	4

Drivers - Court Section

Customer Service	3
Other	1
TOTAL	4

Drivers - Foreign Licence

Length of Time to Produce a Licence	2
Other	1
TOTAL	3

Drivers - Tachos

Administration Procedures	1
Length of Time to Produce a Licence	1
TOTAL	2

Drivers - Scanning / Production

Length of Time to Produce a Licence	1
Maladministration	1
TOTAL	2

Drivers – Post Team

Maladministration	1
Loss of Documents	1
TOTAL	2

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

Centre	2017 - 2018 Reporting Year	Test outcome	Attitude of staff	Conduct of Test
Armagh	4	1	2	0
Ballymena	8	4	2	1
Belfast	19	8	7	0
Coleraine	13	4	6	0
Cookstown	8	3	3	1
Craigavon	7	3	1	0
Downpatrick	1	1	0	0
Enniskillen	4	3	1	0
Larne	6	0	3	1
Lisburn	10	2	2	0
Londonderry	13	9	2	0
Mallusk	5	2	1	1
Newry	6	2	1	2
Newtownards	10	4	3	1
Omagh	5	3	0	0
TOTAL	119	49	34	7

Appendix 3 – Booking Services

Breakdown	
Testing	14
Insufficient Advice	9
Website	2
Administration Procedures	2
Other	3
TOTAL	30

Appendix 4 – Driver Licensing Telephone Enquiries

Breakdown	
Customer Service	3
Insufficient Advice	1
Speed of Response & Efficiency	1
Maladministration	1
TOTAL	6

Appendix 5 – Compliance & Enforcement

Breakdown	
Attitude/ Conduct of Staff	6
Conduct of Test	1
Other	1
TOTAL	8

Appendix 6 – Theory Testing

Breakdown	
Booking difficulties	3
Test Outcome	2
Customer Service	2
Other	3
TOTAL	10

Appendix 7 – Passenger Transport Licensing Division

Breakdown	
Length of time to process application	5
Administration Procedures	2
Customer Service	2
Theory Test	1
TOTAL	10

Appendix 8 – Breakdown of Formal Complaints across DVA

Reason	Complaints
Loss of Documents / Error on Licence / Length of Time to Produce a Licence	96
Decision of Test	49
Attitude/Conduct of staff	40
Customer Service / Speed of Response /Quality of Advice/ Service Provided	36
Maladministration/ Administration Procedures/ Policy / Legislation	19
Booking Systems/ Process/ System Limitations	18
Other	48
Total	306

Appendix 9 – Breakdown of Informal Complaints

Reason	Complaints
Test Outcome	84
Attitude of Examiner or Staff/ Customer Service / Conduct of Test	62
Procedures / Policy / Legislation	8
Other	15
Total	169

Appendix 10 – Vehicle Test Cancellations

Reason	2017-2018 Reporting Year
Heating Failure	75
System failure / fault	25
Brake Testing Equipment / Brake rollers failure	47
Staff Sickness	11
Total	158

Appendix 11 – Driving Test Cancellations

Reason	2017-2018 Reporting Year
Examiner Not Available / Examiner Illness	48
Other	3
Total	51

Appendix 12 – Damage to Vehicles by Centre (paid during the reporting year)

Centre	Number of Incidents paid in 2017/18 reporting year	Total Cost
Armagh	1	£3,297.41
Ballymena	1	£150.00
Belfast	1	£790.01
Coleraine	2	£292.20
Cookstown	3	£1,726.20
Craigavon	2	£390.00
Downpatrick	1	£374.11
Enniskillen	0	£0.00
Larne	2	£1,651.22
Lisburn	2	£382.44
Londonderry	1	£260.90
Mallusk	3	£10,292.92
Newry	2	£4,591.17
Newtownards	4	£1,052.93
Omagh	0	£0.00
Total	25	£25,251.51