



# **How to Make a Comment or Complaint**

## **The Education Authority Comments and Complaints Handling Procedure**

## Chief Executive's Foreword

The Education Authority (EA) is committed to providing the best possible services to support the education and development of children and young people in Northern Ireland. The services we provide are important and they directly contribute in many ways to educational performance in our schools and impact on the life chances of our young people.

We take complaints about our services very seriously and we seek to resolve any dissatisfaction as quickly and as effectively as possible.

The EA Comments and Complaints Handling Procedure has been developed in line with guidance from the Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman and aims to set out clear procedures for the handling of complaints.

Our aim is to provide a quick, simple and streamlined complaints service which leads to early resolution as close to the point of first contact as possible. If this is not possible, we will conduct thorough, impartial and fair investigations so you can be confident that we will make evidence based decisions on the facts of each individual case.

We are committed to continuous improvement and we recognise that genuine comments and complaints can provide valuable information to inform business improvement right across the organisation. Effective management and monitoring of complaints can also help us to identify problems at an early stage so that appropriate action can be taken to avoid repeat problems occurring.

Our aim is to get it right first time, but we recognised that things can go wrong. When they do, we are always willing to listen and to put things right.

It is in all our best interests to work together to resolve complaints swiftly. Effective comments and complaints handling can provide real insight into what we do well and where we can improve. It keeps people at the heart of what we do and helps us to understand your point of view.

Our focus must always be on the children and young people on whose lives we impact every day. We are accountable to them as well as their parents or guardians, schools and the wider community. Our goal is to provide excellent education support services to all.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Boyd', written over a faint, light blue triangular graphic element.

**Gavin Boyd**  
**Chief Executive**

## What is a comment?

EA defines a comment as:

An expression of praise or appreciation directed at staff or a service delivered by EA, a suggested service improvement, or an anonymous complaint where EA has no way to respond.

## What is a complaint?

EA defines a complaint as:

Any expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of EA.

A complaint may relate to:

- failure to provide a service;
- inadequate standard of service;
- treatment by or attitude of a member of staff;
- disagreement with a decision where no other remedial procedure exists (for example an appeal) to resolve the matter; and/or
- EA's failure to follow the appropriate administrative process or policy.

This list is not exhaustive.

This procedure is **not** appropriate for complaints concerning:

- a routine first-time request for a service;
- issues that are currently in court or have already been heard by a court or a statutory tribunal;
- disagreement with a decision where a statutory right of appeal exists to an independent tribunal, for example in relation to school admissions (School Admissions Appeal Tribunal or certain decisions in relation to special educational needs (SENDIST), expulsions (Expulsion Appeal Tribunal) or delivery of the curriculum (Complaints Tribunal); and
- disputes with schools which fall under an individual school's complaints procedures.

This list is not exhaustive.

## How do I make a comment or complaint?

We will always try to resolve any complaint within the relevant frontline service first. You can make a comment or complaint in person, by telephone, in writing, by email or online. EA will accept comments and complaints made on behalf of another party where accessibility issues exist.

When making a complaint, you should provide as much information as possible including:

- your name and contact details;
- what your complaint is about;
- what you have already done to try to resolve it;
- which EA services you have contacted; and
- what you would like EA to do.

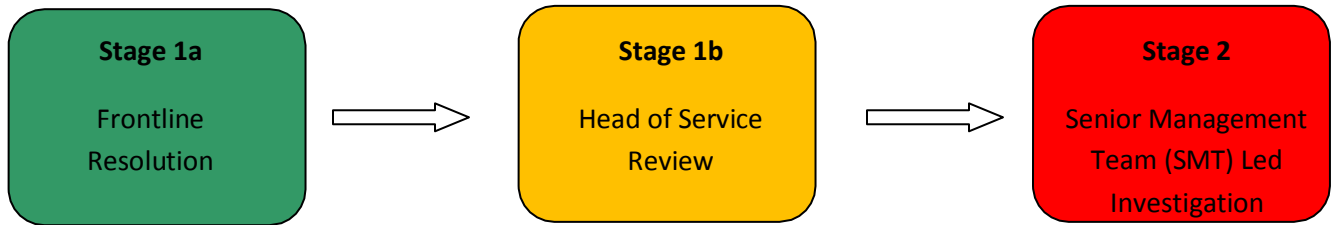
### Contact us

<b>By Phone</b>		You can contact the relevant service directly by calling the local office number below		
<b>Belfast</b> 40 Academy St Belfast BT1 2NQ 028 9056 4000	<b>Armagh</b> The Mall Charlemont Place Armagh BT61 9AX 028 3751 2200	<b>Omagh</b> 1 Hospital Rd Omagh BT79 0AW 028 8241 1411	<b>Dundonald</b> Grahamsbridge Rd Belfast BT16 2HS 028 9056 6200	<b>Ballymena</b> County Hall 182 Galgorm Rd Ballymena BT42 1HN 028 2565 3333
<b>Contact us by post</b>		<b>Complaints Office</b> <b>Education Authority</b> 40 Academy St Belfast BT1 2NQ		
<b>By email</b>		<a href="mailto:feedback@eani.org.uk">feedback@eani.org.uk</a>		
<b>In person</b>		Please contact our main offices listed above to make arrangements if you wish to report your complaint in person.		

## What happens when I make a complaint?

There are three stages in the EA Complaints Handling Procedure. Whilst we hope to resolve most complaints at Stage 1a, some may require further investigation and will receive a more detailed review and investigation as outlined below.

### The Complaints Procedure



#### Stage 1a

You should make contact with the relevant EA service with your complaint in the first instance. A member of the relevant team will try to resolve your complaint immediately or agree to contact you within **five working days** with an outcome. If we need longer, we will contact you and let you know when you can expect a response.

If you do not know who to contact, please contact your local EA Office for advice.

#### Stage 1b

If you are unhappy with the outcome at Stage 1a, please contact the Complaints Office at [feedback@eani.org.uk](mailto:feedback@eani.org.uk) or on 028 8241 1553.

Your complaint will be escalated to the relevant Head of Service for further review at Stage 1b of the EA Complaints Handling Procedure. You will receive an acknowledgement within **five working days**.

A response will be provided no later than **20 working days** from initiation of stage 1b. If we need longer, we will contact you.

## Stage 2

If you are unhappy with the outcome at Stage 1b, please contact the Complaints Office at [feedback@eani.org.uk](mailto:feedback@eani.org.uk) or on 028 8241 1553.

Your complaint will be escalated to a member of the Senior Management Team for further investigation at Stage 2 of the EA Complaints Handling Procedure. You will receive an acknowledgement within **five working days**.

A response will be provided no later than **25 working days** from initiation of stage 2. If we need longer, we will contact you.

## Time Limits

To help us resolve your complaint, please contact us as soon as possible. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, we will only consider a complaint within **six months** of the service user becoming aware of the issue.

## Taking it Further

If you are not happy with our final response, you can contact the Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman. In most instances, the Ombudsman will only investigate a complaint after all the organisation's internal processes have been exhausted.

Please note that the Ombudsman's time limit for review of complaints is **six months** from the date of EA's final response.

## Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

Progressive House  
33 Wellington Place  
Belfast  
BT1 6HN

**Tel:** 0800 34 34 24

**Email:** [ombudsman@ni-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:ombudsman@ni-ombudsman.org.uk)

**Web:** [www.ni-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.ni-ombudsman.org.uk)