



# **EA Complaints**

# **Handling Procedure**

## **1.0 Introduction**

The Education Authority is committed to providing high-quality customer services. We value complaints and use information from them to help us improve our services.

If something goes wrong or you are dissatisfied with our services, please tell us. This leaflet describes our complaints procedure and how to make a complaint. It also tells you about how we will handle your complaint and what you can expect from us.

## **2.0 What is a complaint?**

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

## **3.0 What can I complain about?**

You can complain about things like:

- Failure or refusal to provide a service
- Inadequate quality or standard of service, or an unreasonable delay in providing a service
- Dissatisfaction with one of our policies or its impact on the individual
- Failure to properly apply law, procedure or guidance when delivering services
- Failure to follow the appropriate administrative process
- Conduct, treatment by or attitude of a member of staff or contractor, or
- Disagreement with a decision, except where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision, or an established appeals process followed – see “What Can't I Complain About?”

## **4.0 What can't I complain about?**

There are some things we can't deal with through our Complaints Handling Procedure. Examples include:

- 4.1 A routine first-time request for a service or to deal with a problem
- 4.2 Issues that are in court or have already been heard by a court or a tribunal (if you

decide to take legal action, you should let us know as the complaint cannot then be considered under this process)

- 4.3 Disagreement with a decision where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision or an established appeals process followed e.g. Transport Appeals
- 4.4 A request for information under the Data Protection or Freedom of Information legislation
- 4.5 A grievance by a staff member or a grievance relating to employment or staff Recruitment
- 4.6 A concern raised internally by a member of staff e.g. a whistleblowing concern
- 4.7 A concern about a child or an adult's safety (EA Child Protection Policies will be considered)
- 4.8 An attempt to reopen a previously concluded complaint or to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision
- 4.9 Abuse or unsubstantiated allegations about our organisation or staff where such actions would be covered by our Unreasonable Complaints Policy, or
- 4.10 A concern about the actions or service of a different organisation, where we have no involvement in the issue (except where the other organisation is delivering services on our behalf)

If other procedures or rights of appeal can help you resolve your concerns, we will give information and advice to help you.

Schools have their own separate complaints procedure therefore the EA is unable to investigate complaints about a school. School complaints should be raised directly with the school.

## **5.0 Who can complain?**

Any one member of the public who receives, requests or is directly affected by our services can make a complaint to us. This includes the representative of someone who is dissatisfied with our service (for example, a relative, friend, advocate or adviser). If you are making a complaint on someone else's behalf, you will need their written consent. Please also read the section on getting help to make your complaint below.

## **6.0 How do I complain?**

You can complain:

- In person at any of our offices
- By phone
- In writing to EA Corporate Complaints Service, 1 Hospital Road, Omagh, BT79 0AW
- By email to [feedback@eani.org.uk](mailto:feedback@eani.org.uk)
- Or via our [Online Complaints Form](#)

It is easier for us to address complaints if you make them quickly and directly to the service concerned. So please talk to a member of our staff at the service you are complaining about. Then they can try to resolve the issue.

When complaining, please tell us:

- Your full name and contact details
- As much as you can about the complaint
- What has gone wrong, and
- What outcome you are seeking

## **7.0 How long do I have to make a complaint?**

Normally, you must make your complaint within six months of:

- The event you want to complain about; or
- Finding out that you have a reason to complain.

In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

## **8.0 What happens when I have complained?**

We will always tell you who is dealing with your complaint. Our complaints procedure has two stages.

### **8.1 Stage 1: Frontline response**

We aim to respond to complaints quickly (where possible, when you first tell us about the issue). This could mean an on-the-spot apology and explanation if something has clearly gone wrong, or immediate action to resolve the problem.

We will give you our decision at Stage 1 in five working days or less, unless there are Exceptional circumstances.

If you are not satisfied with the response we give at this stage, we will tell you what you can do next. If you choose to, you can take your complaint to Stage 2. You must normally ask us to consider your complaint at Stage 2 either:

- Within six months of the event you want to complain about or finding out that you have a reason to complain; or
- Within two months of receiving your stage 1 response (if this is later).

In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a stage 2 complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

## **8.2 Stage 2: Investigation**

Stage 2 deals with two types of complaints:

- where the customer remains dissatisfied after Stage 1, and
- those that clearly require investigation, and so are handled directly at this stage

If you do not wish your complaint to be handled at Stage 1, you can ask us to handle it at Stage 2 instead.

When using Stage 2:

- We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within five working days
- We will confirm our understanding of the complaint we will investigate and what outcome you are looking for
- We will try to resolve your complaint where we can (in some cases we may suggest using an alternative complaint resolution approach, such as mediation)
- Where we cannot resolve your complaint, we will give you a full response as soon as possible, normally within 25 working days
- If our investigation will take longer than 25 working days, we will tell you. We will tell you our revised time limits and keep you updated on progress.

## **8.3 What if I'm still dissatisfied?**

After we have given you our final decision, if you are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with your complaint, you can ask the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) to look at it.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE NIPSO

The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) is the final stage for complaints about public services in NI. This includes complaints about the EA. The NIPSO is an independent organisation that investigates complaints. The service provided by NIPSO is free. It is not an advocacy or support service (but there are other organisations who can help you with advocacy or support).

If you remain dissatisfied when you have had a final response from the EA, you can ask the NIPSO to look at your complaint. You can ask the NIPSO to look at your complaint if:

- You have gone all the way through the EA's Complaints Handling Procedure
- It is less than 6 months since you received correspondence from the EA informing you that the complaints handling procedure is complete and of your right to refer your complaint to NIPSO.

The NIPSO will ask you to complete a complaint form and provide a copy of this letter (our final response to your complaint). You can do this online at [NIPSO Online Complaints Form](#) or call them on Freephone 0800 343424.

You may wish to get independent support or advocacy to help you progress your complaint, Citizens Advice may be able to assist you.

NIPSO's contact details are:

The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman  
33 Wellington Place  
Belfast  
BT1 6HN

**Tel Freephone:** 0800 34 34 24

**Email:** [nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.nipso.org.uk](http://www.nipso.org.uk)

## 9.0 Getting help to make your complaint

We understand that you may be unable or reluctant to make a complaint yourself. We accept complaints from the representative of a person who is dissatisfied with our service. We can take complaints from a friend, relative, or an advocate, if you have given them your consent to complain for you.

You can find out about advisers and advocates in your area through the Citizens Advice Website: [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk).

We are committed to making our service easy to use for all members of the community. In line with our statutory equality duties, we will always ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to help you access and use our services. If you have trouble putting your complaint in writing, or want this information in another language or format, such as large font, or Braille, please tell us in person, contact us on: 028 8241 1472.

<b>Our contact details</b>	
<b>Contact us by phone:</b>	Complaints Office Telephone number: 028 8241 1472
<b>Contact us by post:</b>	Corporate Complaints Service 1 Hospital Road Omagh Co Tyrone BT79 0AW
<b>By email:</b>	<a href="mailto:feedback@eani.org.uk">feedback@eani.org.uk</a>
<b>Online Complaints Form:</b>	<a href="#">Online Complaints Form</a>
<b>In person or by phone:</b>	You can contact the relevant service directly by contacting one of our main offices (see below). Alternatively, the office can help you make arrangements if you wish to report your complaint in person.

<b>Belfast Office</b> 40 Academy Street Belfast BT1 2NQ <b>T: 028 9056 4000</b>	<b>Armagh Office</b> 3 Charlemont Place The Mall Armagh BT61 9AX <b>T: 028 3751 2200</b>	<b>Ballee Centre</b> 2-6 Ballee Road West Ballymena BT42 2HS <b>T: 028 25 66 1111</b>
<b>Dundonald Office</b> Grahamsbridge Road Dundonald Belfast BT16 2HS <b>T: 028 9056 6200</b>	<b>Ballymena Office</b> 182 Galgorm Road Ballymena BT42 1HN <b>T: 028 25 661111</b>	<b>Behaviour Support and Provisions (Primary and Post Primary)</b> Silverwood Centre Lough Road Lurgan BT66 6LX <b>T: 02838 314450</b>

We can also give you this leaflet in other languages and formats (such as large print, Audio and Braille). See below our quick guide to our Complaints Handling Procedure.

## Complaints Handling Procedure

You can make your complaint in person, by phone, by email or in writing. You have a **two stage complaints procedure**. We will always try to deal with your complaint quickly. But if it is clear that the matter will need investigation, we will tell you and keep you updated on the progress.

### **Stage 1: Frontline Response.**

We will always try to respond to your complaint quickly, within five working days if we can. If you are dissatisfied with our response, you can ask us to consider your complaint at Stage

2.

### **Stage 2 Investigation.**

We will look at your complaints at this stage if you are dissatisfied with our response at Stage 1.

We also look at complaints immediately at this stage, if it is clear that they need investigation.

We will acknowledge your complaint within five working days.

We will confirm the points of complaint to be investigated and what you want to achieve. We will investigate the complaint and give you our decision as soon as possible. This will be after no more than 25 working days unless there is clearly a good reason for needing more time.

### **Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO).**

If after receiving our final decision on your complaint, you remain dissatisfied with our decision or the way we have handled your complaint, you can ask the NIPSO to consider it.

We will tell you how to do this when we send our final decision.