

How to complain : using the Department's complaints procedure

The Department of Health aims to provide a high quality and efficient service to all customers. We listen to both positive and critical comments and use them to improve our services, so if you have views about our services and the way they are provided, we would like to hear them. These pages contain our complaints procedure and guidance on using it.

A complaint is any written or spoken expression of dissatisfaction with the service we provide.

We take complaints seriously. Our aims are to :

- deal with complaints openly, promptly and properly;
- try to resolve complaints as soon as we can; and
- learn from complaints and improve our services

What we do

The Department of Health is responsible for setting standards and agreeing policy for health and personal social services in England. Here we explain how to make a complaint about the work of Department of Health or its staff and how we will respond.

Complaints about the NHS, local social services and Department of Health executive agencies

For guidance about the complaints procedures of the Department's executive agencies (these are agencies that are still part of the Department and accountable to it), the NHS and local social services please see the appendix attached to this procedure.

How to contact us

If you have any enquiries about the work of the Department of Health please contact our Customer Service Centre. The telephone number is 020 7210 4850 (lines open from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm Monday to Friday, excluding Bank Holidays). If you are hearing impaired, the textphone number is 020 7210 5025.

This guidance can also be made available on request in Braille, on audio cassette tape, on disk, in large print and in other languages.

Complaining about the Department of Health

You can complain about the Department of Health or a member of staff in writing, by fax, by email, by telephone.

If you know the part of the Department that is relevant to your complaint, or the name or title of the appropriate senior member of staff, please make your complaint directly to them (referring to this complaints procedure would be helpful).

If you do not have this information you can ask the Customer Service Centre. Staff there will either direct you to the right person or take a note of your complaint and pass it to the relevant person within 24 hours.

If you wish to put your complaint in writing and are unsure where to address it, please send it either by email to dhmail@dh.gsi.gov.uk (it is helpful if you title your message "complaint") or by letter to :

Veronica Fraser
Head of Complaints and Public Enquiries
Customer Service Centre
Department of Health
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NS

If you wish to fax your complaint to the Customer Service Centre, the number to use is 020 7210 5454.

What happens next?

The Department's complaints procedure has five stages as follows.

Stage 1 – informal resolution

If you complain over the telephone, we will try to resolve your complaint on the spot. Similarly, if you complain in writing, by fax or by email, we will respond promptly, and in any case within 20 working days of receipt. If this is not possible, we will explain why and give you a new deadline.

Stage 2 – formal complaint

If you are not happy with the initial response you receive, you can get back in touch with us and ask for your complaint to be referred to the appropriate manager who will try to resolve the issue.

Stage 3 – second stage resolution

If, following your second response, you are still not satisfied, you can ask for your complaint to be referred to Head of the Customer Service Centre who will reply in writing within 20 days, or write to let you know why this cannot be done and give you a new deadline.

Stage 4 – independent adjudication

If you remain dissatisfied we will refer your complaint to someone independent of the Department but with relevant knowledge and expertise who will review

our handling of your complaint. We will write to you giving you their details including how to contact them directly.

Stage 5 – Parliamentary Ombudsman

If you remain unhappy with the Department's actions, you may ask a Member of Parliament to request that the Independent Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (the Ombudsman) investigates your complaint and the way it has been handled. If the Ombudsman is satisfied that your complaint has been dealt with fairly, s/he will close your case.

Dealing with your complaint - our standards

All our staff will be courteous and helpful. We will identify ourselves when answering the telephone and at any time we are requested to do so by the public. All telephone calls will be answered promptly. Where an answerphone is used, calls will be returned within 1 working day.

We will answer all letters within 20 working days of receipt. We will aim to answer all the points raised in correspondence accurately and use plain English. If it is not possible to reply within 20 working days, we will send an interim reply explaining the delay, answering any points we can and advising when you can expect a full reply.

Freedom of Information Act–The Department of Health has established a complaints procedure for dealing with complaints under Freedom of Information. Details are available from www.dh.gov.uk/freedomofinformation. We will give you full reasons for any refusal to allow access to information that we hold.

Improving our complaints procedure. If you have any suggestions or comments about our complaints procedure please send them to Veronica Fraser at the Customer Service Centre at the address given above.

In return, we would ask that you treat Departmental staff politely and with respect. In certain circumstances we may refuse to deal with you. We take staff harassment seriously and will report cases to the police.

Complaints relating to the executive agencies of the Department of Health

There are 3 executive agencies of the Department, each with their own complaints procedure which you can obtain by contacting them directly at the following addresses :

Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) (formerly the Medicines Control Agency and Medical Devices Agency)

The MHRA is responsible for protecting and promoting public health and patient safety by ensuring that medicines, healthcare products and medical equipment meet appropriate standards of safety, quality, performance and effectiveness, and are used safely.

Their contact details are :

Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency

Market Towers
1 Nine Elms Lane
London SW8 5NQ

Telephone 020-7273 0000 (weekdays 0900 -1700)

Telephone 020-7210 3000 (other times)

Fax 020-7273 0353

E-mail: info@mhra.gsi.gov.uk

Website : www.mhra.gov.uk

NHS Estates

NHS Estates is responsible for supporting the provision of high-quality NHS buildings and facilities

Their contact details are :

NHS Estates
The Information Centre
1 Trevelyan Square
Leeds LS1 6AE

Tel : 0113 254 7070

Fax : 0113 254 7167

Email : nhs.estates@dh.gsi.gov.uk

Website : www.nhsestates.gov.uk

NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency

The role of the agency is to act as a centre of expertise, knowledge and excellence in purchasing and supply matters for the health service.

Their contact details are :

NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency
Premier House
60 Caversham Road
Reading
RG1 7EB

Telephone: 0118 980 8600

Fax: 0118 980 8650

Website : www.pasa.nhs.uk

Complaints about the NHS

NHS staff do whatever they can to ensure you are treated properly and promptly. However, sometimes things do go wrong. Anyone who is receiving, or has received, NHS treatment or services can complain using the standard NHS complaints procedure.

If you are unable to complain yourself then someone else – for example, a relative or close friend – can complain for you.

More detail on how to complain about NHS services or treatment is available on the nhs.uk website and from NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk . You can also download a leaflet from the Department of Health's website www.dh.gov.uk which explains the NHS complaints procedure.

A Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) has been established in every NHS Trust and Primary Care Trust. PALS are not part of the complaints procedure but can provide advice, including about local independent complaints advocacy services.

NHS Foundation Trusts

NHS Foundation Trusts have their own systems for handling complaints and you will need to contact the Trust for information on how to complain.

Complaints about local social services

The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) website (www.csci.org.uk) sets out how to complain about a care service provider and about how to make a complaint about the Commission itself.