



# Customer Guide to Complaints

## Scottish Legal Aid Board complaints procedure

The Scottish Legal Aid Board is committed to providing high-quality customer service.

**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 information sheet describes our complaints procedure and how to make a complaint. It also tells you about our service standards and what you can expect from us.

### What is a complaint?

We regard a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action.

### What can I complain about?

You can complain about things like:

- Delays in responding to your enquiries and requests
- Failure to provide a service
- Our standard of service
- Our policy
- Treatment by or attitude of a member of staff
- Our failure to follow proper procedure

Your complaint may involve more than one service or be about someone working on our behalf.

### What isn't covered by the complaints procedure?

There are some things we can't deal with through our complaints handling procedure. These include:

- A routine first-time request for a service
- A request for an explanation of our policies and/or regulations
- Requests for compensation
- Grants of legal aid to opponents or third parties
- Things that are covered by a right of review of an application or other review procedure, e.g. refusal of a legal aid application

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

### Who can complain?

Anyone can make a complaint to us, including the representative of someone who is dissatisfied with our service. Please also read the section on 'Getting help to make your complaint'.

## How do I complain?

You can complain in person, by phone, in writing, or email.

It is easier for us to resolve complaints if you make them quickly and directly to the department concerned. So please talk to a member of our staff in the department you are complaining about. Then they can try to resolve any problems on the spot.

When complaining, tell us:

- Your full name and address
- If your complaint concerns an application you have with us - the reference number
- As much as you can about the complaint
- What has gone wrong
- How you want us to resolve the matter

## 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, but no longer than 12 months after the event itself

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.

## What happens when I have complained?

We will always tell you who is dealing with your complaint.

Our complaints procedure has two stages:

### ***Stage One - frontline resolution***

We aim to resolve complaints quickly and close to where we provided the service. This could mean an on-the-spot apology and explanation if something has clearly gone wrong, and immediate action to resolve the problem.

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

If we can't resolve your complaint at this stage, we will explain why and tell you what you can do next. We might suggest that you take your complaint to Stage Two. You may choose to do this immediately or sometime after you get our initial decision.

### ***Stage Two - investigation***

Stage Two deals with two types of complaint: those that have not been resolved at Stage One and those that are complex and require detailed investigation.

When using Stage Two we will:

- Acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three working days

- Where appropriate, discuss your complaint with you to understand why you remain dissatisfied and what outcome you are looking for
- Give you a full response to the complaint as soon as possible and within 20 working days

If our investigation will take longer than 20 working days, we will tell you. We will agree revised time limits with you and keep you updated on progress.

## What if I'm still dissatisfied?

After we have fully investigated, if you are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with your complaint, you can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to look at it.

The SPSO cannot normally look at:

- A complaint that has not completed our complaints procedure **(so please make sure it has done so before contacting the SPSO)**
- Events that happened, or that you became aware of, more than a year ago
- A matter that has been or is being considered in court

You can contact the **SPSO**:

*In Person:* SPSO, Bridgeside House, 99 McDonald Road, Edinburgh, EH7 4NS

*By Post:* Freepost SPSO

*Freephone:* 0800 377 7330

*Online contact:* [www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us](http://www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us)

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

*Mobile site:* <http://m.spsso.org.uk>

If your complaint concerns the service provided by your solicitor, including in the Public Defence Solicitors Office, the Civil Legal Assistance Office or the Solicitors Contact Line, you may also make a complaint to The Scottish Legal Complaints Commission (SLCC). This is an independent body set up by the Scottish Government to investigate all complaints about the service of the legal profession.

You can contact the **SLCC**:

*By Post:* The Scottish Legal Complaints Commission, The Stamp Office 10-14 Waterloo Place Edinburgh, EH1 3EG

*Telephone:* 0131 201 2130

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

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

## 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 advocates in your area by contacting the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance.

## Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance

*Tel:* 0131 260 5380

*Fax:* 0131 260 5381

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

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

We are committed to making our service easy to use for all members of the community. In line with our statutory equalities duties, we will always ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to help customers 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, tell us in person or contact us to discuss this.

## Our contact details

*In person:* The Scottish Legal Aid Board, Thistle House, 91 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh, EH12 5HE. Our standard opening times are Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.

*Telephone:* Our main switchboard telephone number is 0131 226 7061 (open Monday to Friday 8.30am to 5pm). Calls by BT Text Direct are welcome. Please note that for training and monitoring purposes your call may be recorded.

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

## Quick guide to our complaints procedure

### Complaints procedure

You can make your complaint in person, by phone, by e-mail or in writing.

We 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 a detailed investigation, we will tell you and keep you updated on our progress.

### Stage 1 - frontline resolution

We will always try to resolve 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 complaint at this stage if you are dissatisfied with our response at Stage 1.

We also look at some complaints immediately at this stage, if it is clear that they are complex or need detailed investigation.

We will acknowledge your complaint within **three working days**. We will give you our decision as soon as possible. This will be after no more than **20 working days** *unless* there is clearly a good reason for needing more time.

### The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

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 SPSO to consider it.

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