

How we look into complaints

Our job is to make final decisions about unresolved complaints. We have a **three-step process** for doing this. This is a simple guide to what we do. To find out more take a look at our website at www.ombudsman.org.uk or call us on 0345 015 4033.



Step one

When you first contact us



What happens?

First we do some initial checks to make sure we can deal with your complaint. This includes checking that:

- We can look into the organisation and issue you're complaining about
- You have been through the organisation's own complaints process already

How long does this take?

We aim to complete these checks within five working days.

What can we decide?

If we can deal with your complaint, we'll let you know and refer it on to step two. Around 25% of complaints that come to us are taken forward to the next step.

If we can't take your complaint forward, we'll give you information about what you can do next. This includes giving advice about how to complain to the organisation you're unhappy with, if you haven't done this already.

Step two

Deciding whether to investigate your complaint



What happens?

We take a closer look at your complaint to decide if we should investigate. We look at several things, including:

- whether you have been affected personally by what happened
- whether you complained (to us or an MP) within a year of knowing about the issue
- whether you have (or had) the option of taking legal action instead
- whether there are signs that the organisation potentially got things wrong that have had a negative effect on you that hasn't been put right

How long does this take?

We aim to give you our decision within 20 working days of receiving your complaint.

What can we decide?

If we decide we should investigate your complaint, we will let you know what will happen next.

If we decide not to investigate your complaint, we will explain why. We will let you know if there are other options open to you and what these are

Step three

Investigating your complaint



What happens?

We'll talk to you about your concerns and what we're going to investigate. We'll tell you how long we think our investigation will take and we'll keep you regularly updated. We'll gather all the information we need, including from you and the organisation you have complained about, before we make our final decision on your complaint.

How long does this take?

We aim to complete most of our investigations within three to six months. Some take longer than this, but we aim to complete 95% within a year.

What can we decide?

If we uphold your complaint it means that we found the organisation got things wrong and you have been negatively affected because of this. It also means things haven't been put right and we can recommend what the organisation should do about this.

Of the complaints we investigate each year, we uphold, in full or in part, around 50%.