

Our equality, diversity and inclusion statement

April 2025

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The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) independently investigates complaints about UK government departments, other public organisations and the NHS in England. We believe in the power of complaints in transforming public services. Everyone should be able to complain, regardless of who they are, how they identify or where they come from.

Our equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) principles are embedded in the way we work and how we handle complaints.

Our legal framework

Our work is underpinned by the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998, which require us to uphold people's rights and dignity.

We recognise and support the nine protected characteristics, which are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment (which includes gender identity or expression)
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation.

Our EDI responsibilities

This statement supports our strategy for 2025 to 2026 and will help us to achieve our three objectives over the next year. Our objectives are to:

- improve **access** to our service by removing barriers, developing our relationships with the advisory sector, and building trust with groups who do not often access our service so that they feel able to come to us
- provide an exceptional **user experience** by making it easier to bring complaints to us and improving the standard of complaint handling in public services
- deliver **impact** from our casework by reviewing whether we are making the right types of recommendations and whether they are having the impact we want to see.

Improving access to our service

Everyone should be able to use our service without facing unnecessary barriers. We know complaints affect people from some groups and communities differently. Our strategy for 2025 to 2026 includes our commitment to making our service fairer and more accessible. We will create a diverse and inclusive environment where everyone can feel able to bring their complaints to us.

‘The people who need our service have often been through traumatic experiences. It is vital that they are able to find us in the moments that matter and that we make it as easy as possible for them to submit complaints.’ Our strategy 2025 to 2026

We know people’s experiences of public services can differ. For example, almost four times as many black women die in childbirth compared to white women ([Black maternal health’, Women and Equalities Committee](#)).

Studies also demonstrate that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities experience difficulties accessing services.

**‘The majority shared negative experiences [of public services]. In health, people spoke of being turned away by frontline health services.’
[Traveller Movement](#)**

‘Levels of knowledge about mental health and access to services were found to be low and inconsistent... [literacy levels were] a huge barrier to the take up of help.’ [NHS Race and Observatory](#)

We want to understand why there are differences for these groups and others and what the barriers are for translating their experiences into complaints.

We now ask people who bring complaints to us to provide information including their age and their ethnicity. We will use this data to better understand who uses our service and will do more work to understand who does not and why. We will share this summary data to be transparent.

In our report ‘[Complaints that come to us too early](#)’ we learned that just under half of the people who complain to us found it easy. The people we spoke to said the level of detail needed when completing the form, and the complex language, made it harder to complain. This included people who spoke English as a second language or had a long-term health condition.

We want to make sure it is easier for everyone to complain. We will continue to assess how we do this and what changes we may need to make to our process. One way in which we are already doing this is by expanding our digital self-service so people can submit complaints online.

We want to work with people who find it hard to access our service to understand why, so that we can make it easier for them to come to us. To do this, we will use our engagement work to understand what barriers are currently in place and how we can remove these to improve access. We will use our data and work with different groups to make sure we have the impact we want.

‘Spotlight on the Windrush Compensation Scheme’ report

Our [Windrush report](#) highlighted cases where people trying to access the Compensation Scheme had experienced long delays in getting a decision.

As of March 2024, the Compensation Scheme had received 7,688 claims. Since we started getting complaints about the Compensation Scheme in 2021, we have only received around 50. We want to better understand why so few complaints came to us and how we can improve this.

Providing an exceptional user experience

‘Our values of impartiality and fairness drive everything that we do. In living those values it is vital that we give people and organisations the best possible experience of working with us.’ Our strategy 2025 to 2026

We want to centre our service around the people who use it so we can provide an exceptional user experience. We will listen to people’s feedback to help us improve and to involve them in future decisions about how we work.

Our Public Engagement Advisory Group (PEAG)

Our independent PEAG gives us an important external perspective on our work. The PEAG includes people from a diverse range of backgrounds, including both people who have complained to us before and some who have not. This means we can capture different views and experiences. The PEAG provides feedback on different topics to make sure we learn from their experiences and continue improving our service. Members can be part of the group for up to two years. We then invite new members so we can continue to hear different voices and perspectives.

Our PEAG members have provided feedback on a range of topics, including how we can provide an empathetic service and how we can best manage demand.

Training delivered to caseworkers includes first-hand accounts from people who have shared their experiences of when things go wrong in public services. This helps our caseworkers to understand the impacts on people when things go wrong and is a powerful reminder of how important empathy is to our complainants.

It is important that we have different ways for people to contact us. Either speaking to us on the phone or writing to us could be a barrier for some people. To make it easier to complain, we are expanding our digital self-service offer so that people can submit complaints and evidence online and track their complaint.

Not everyone has access to technology. For example, a [Women and Equalities Committee report](#) showed that 29% of adults aged over 75 do not have internet access at home, compared to 6% of all adults. By improving access to our online services we will have more time to speak with people who find it difficult to access technology.

We will continue to adjust our service for disabled people to address the barriers they can face when bringing a complaint to us. For example, we will help someone fill out a complaint form over the phone if they have difficulty writing.

We will review data on the disability of complainants and the reasonable adjustments offered through our casework. This will help us understand the types of barriers people experience and will inform any changes we could make to how we manage complaints.

We collect data and feedback about our service throughout the complaint journey using surveys, telephone research and feedback that people give us directly.

Having a better understanding of the lived experience of our complainants is vital to providing an exceptional user experience. We have a diverse workforce at PHSO. We also know that our leadership teams are less representative of the community than other parts of the organisation and this is something we need to continue to work towards improving. We do this by taking active steps through our recruitment and selection processes to increase accessibility and attract candidates from a diverse range of backgrounds. We also monitor statistics through the different stages of our process to better understand candidate journeys through an EDI lens.

Delivering impact from our casework

‘Learning from complaints can bring change and help improve public services and the relationship between people and the state. This requires us to be transparent and open as an organisation.’ Our strategy 2025 to 2026

Studies have shown that different communities can experience disparities in public service outcomes. For example, evidence published in The Lancet highlights that prolonged waiting times for gender-affirming care can contribute to poorer health outcomes for transgender and gender diverse people. These outcomes can include a greater likelihood of needing additional care because of adverse effects on mental and physical wellbeing.

We know that where a range of interventions are required, it can be challenging for people to make a complaint when they need to. That is why we want to make it easier for people to complain and to make sure that those who have already overcome numerous challenges can bring a complaint to us. This will also help us to investigate more issues than we have before.

When it looks like we might need to take further action on a complaint, we will carry out a detailed investigation. We ask everyone involved in a complaint to tell us what information they want us to consider. We involve them throughout the process. We make sure our decisions are independent and, where necessary, take specialist advice and consider relevant professional standards to support our work. We want the people bringing a complaint to us, and the organisation complained about, to be confident that we are delivering an impartial and evidence-based decision.

We want to focus our detailed investigations on the issues where we think we can have a bigger impact. We will develop better ways of looking at the information we have about our casework to understand when an issue affects many people.

We want to use this information to make decisions that benefit individuals and give public services recommendations to work on so they can improve their services and avoid the same complaints happening again.

End-of-life care: improving ‘do not attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation’ (DNACPR) conversations for everyone

‘During the COVID-19 pandemic we received a higher number of complaints than normal about communication of “do not attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation” (DNACPR) decisions. Almost all of the DNACPR complaints brought to us were from or on behalf of disabled people or older people. If you build a system to support the most underrepresented and underserved, it should serve everyone better.’ [Our DNACPR report](#)

We recommended that all NHS-funded providers should have their staff complete additional training on CPR and that this should be co-designed by the people who use their services.

We want to identify more trends and themes in our work. We will gather data from complaints where people tell us their protected characteristics were a factor in how they were treated by the organisation they complain about.

We are committed to publishing more of our casework decisions. By being transparent about the decisions we make, we want to gain public confidence that we are a fair and inclusive organisation that values every complaint and encourages everyone to use our service when they need it. We want our decisions to support organisations to learn lessons and improve their services.