

## Complaints

There may be an occasion when a problem arises, and you do not receive the quality of service that you expect. When that happens, we want to put it right and learn from the experience going forward. If your experience falls below expectation, we appreciate you letting us know<sup>1</sup> so that we can work to resolve issues as quickly as possible and improve our services further.

Any person or organisation can raise a complaint about an aspect of the work of ETI if they, or the person they represent, are unhappy about our work. This may include concerns around an Inspector's behaviour, protocols not followed, or a challenge to our evaluations. These are concerns **related directly to the work of ETI**.

Reflecting the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman's (NIPSO) principles, we aim to:

- treat all complaints seriously, handling them efficiently and effectively, while trying to **fix them early**;
- **focus on the complaint**, by pursuing the facts in order to find resolution in a timely manner by informal means at an appropriate level wherever possible, and providing an accessible means of formal resolution should informal attempts fail;
- **be fair in handling complaints** by responding to all complaints, providing equal treatment consistently to all customers;
- **be honest, open and transparent** in responding to all complaints; and
- use the complaint as **an opportunity to learn and improve our services further**.

## What is a complaint?

A complaint may be defined as an expression of discontent about an aspect of our service, a document created or published by ETI that requires, or behaviours of those working on behalf of ETI.

We recognise that complaints are likely to have caused hurt, upset or a sense of injustice. A complaint may be due to:

- an action or lack of action; and/or
- the standard of service ETI has provided; and/or
- the behaviours and conduct of a member of ETI staff, or any associate or representative working on our behalf.

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<sup>1</sup> In drafting this complaints procedure, account has been taken of the guidance contained in the [principles](#) set out in the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's website.

## **Who can make a complaint**

Any person who is not satisfied with an aspect of our service delivery and feels that they have been treated unjustly by those representing ETI in whatever capacity may make a complaint.

The person initiating the complaint may be acting on their own or on behalf of a group or organisation that we inspect or interact with, whilst conducting our work. If the person works in a school/organisation and wishes to move the complaint to Stage 2 of the complaints procedure, the person must have the permission of both the leader and the chair of the board of governors/head of the management committee prior to making a Stage 2 complaint. This is to ensure that the investigating officer assigned to the complaint can investigate the matter fully.

## **How to make a complaint**

The ETI's procedures on how to make a complaint are under review. We are in the process of consulting with the teaching unions, practitioners, parents/carers, and learners to ensure our procedures meet fully the needs of our customers and reflect best customer service practice.

## **The Three Stages in Complaint Handling**

### **Stage 1: Informal Complaint Resolution**

Our aim is to resolve any complaint quickly and you are invited initially to bring any matter of concern to the attention of the Reporting Inspector or the District Inspector, or by contacting the Inspection Services Team. If following this action your complaint has not been resolved to your satisfaction, you may initiate a complaint in writing.

### **Stage 2: Formal Written Complaint Resolution**

You can make a complaint by writing a letter or email (**using the ETI Complaints Form**) at any stage *during* an inspection activity, or up to 12 weeks from the date of the conclusion of the inspection activity (normally the oral report back).

When a complaint is formalised in this way, the leader of the organisation and/or the chair of governors/management committee must be informed of your intention to make a formal complaint. This is to ensure that the investigating officer assigned to the complaint can investigate the matter fully.

A completed complaints form should be sent either by post or electronically to:

Complaints  
Inspection Services Team  
Education and Training Inspectorate  
Rathgael House  
43 Balloo Road  
BANGOR  
Co Down  
BT19 7PR

Email: [eti@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:eti@education-ni.gov.uk)

It is important that you set out clearly the context of, and the reasons for, your complaint using the complaint form. We will acknowledge receipt of the written complaint within 3 working days of receipt, and the investigation will begin within 5 working days of receipt.

An investigating officer, usually a managing inspector (who will have had no previous involvement with the complaint or associated inspection), will be assigned to investigate thoroughly your complaint. The process will involve scrutiny and consideration of any evidence you provide and may also involve contacting individual inspectors or teams whose work or practice is the subject of complaint, to evidence their work and views. The process may also necessitate contacting you to clarify and agree the terms of reference for investigating the complaint or discuss information that has been provided (if necessary).

It is not always possible to give a timescale for when you will receive a substantive response, but you will be kept up to date on how the investigation is progressing. We aim to have a written response within 20 working days of the date the complaint was received in writing. A substantive response will be provided to all the issues raised in the formal complaint.

The publication of an inspection report will not be delayed during the investigation of a complaint. This will enable an organisation to begin work on addressing any areas for improvement as soon as possible, while meeting the needs of the organisations and individuals that read the reports as part of our statutory duty on reporting.

The ETI's written response to you will include:

- the outcome of the investigation, which can be one of four outcomes, namely:
  - upheld;
  - upheld partially;
  - not upheld; or,
  - inconclusive (owing to differing opinions that cannot be corroborated).

Complaints may relate to situations that do not have a clear-cut solution, such as: aspects of personal conduct; diverging interpretations of things spoken where there may be differing accounts of what was said, what happened or in understanding; or, differences of opinion that cannot reasonably be easily resolved. Rather than accepting one party's account over another, the outcome of the investigation into the complaint may record the outcome as inconclusive.

Where the complaint is upheld or upheld partially (or inconclusive, as appropriate), the conclusion will contain the action/s that ETI will take to address the issue and ensure that we learn and improve our services, so it does not happen again. All complaints are monitored quarterly, and trends are analysed to identify areas for service improvement.

### **Stage 3: Formal Complaint Review**

If after Stage 2 of the procedure is complete, you are not satisfied with the way in which the complaint was investigated, or you feel the outcome is unfair or incorrect, you have the right to ask us to escalate the matter to Stage 3, to request a review to look at how your complaint was investigated and dealt with. We will acknowledge your request for a review within 3 working days of receipt.

Your request for a review should:

- outline clearly the reasons why you are not satisfied with the initial conclusion and the investigation;
- provide any supporting evidence you feel appropriate; and
- tell us what you would like us to do.

Based on the nature of the complaint, the Chief Inspector will decide whether it is appropriate for an internal reviewer to be assigned to undertake a Stage 3 complaints review. The internal reviewer will normally be an assistant chief inspector who will have had no previous involvement in the complaint. The internal reviewer will consider whether the Stage 2 process was handled fairly and properly, and whether the matters raised were responded to fully and appropriately, based on the available evidence.

The internal reviewer will present their findings to a scrutiny panel. The composition of the scrutiny panel is currently under review. This review involves consultation with representation of the key stakeholders affected by any changes to these procedures, including teaching union representation, leaders, and boards of governors.

The scrutiny panel will make the final decision on the outcome of the review. The Chief Inspector will normally provide a written response to you within 20 working days and will tell you:

- whether the previous investigation was thorough, fair and objective;
- whether the review upholds, amends or rejects the outcomes of the previous investigation;
- what actions, if any, will be taken; and
- what you can do if you are not satisfied with the outcome of the review.

## **The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman**

If we fail in resolving your complaint, you may complain to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman about some aspects of our work. The Ombudsman will not consider complaints relating to the professional judgements made by an inspection team unless there were shortcomings of an administrative nature or where we did not adhere to our own policy or procedure.

## **Making a complaint about the work of ETI**

### **Who can make a complaint**

- Any person who is not satisfied with an aspect of our service delivery and feels that they have been treated unjustly by those representing ETI in whatever capacity.
- If the person works in a school/organisation and wishes to move the complaint to Stage 2 of the complaints procedure, the person must have the permission of both the leader and the chair of the board of governors/head of the management committee prior to making a Stage 2 complaint. This is to ensure that the investigating officer assigned to the complaint can investigate the matter fully.

### **What do I need to do**

- Talk to the Reporting Inspector or District Inspector, or contact Inspection Services Team in the first instance.

### **How**

- By telephone: 028 9127 9726.
- By making contact with the Reporting Inspector or District Inspector.
- By email: [eti@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:eti@education-ni.gov.uk)
- By post: ETI, Rathgael House, 43 Balloo Road, Rathgill, Bangor, BT19 7PR.
- Stage 2: Complete the [form](#) in Appendix 1.
- Stage 3: Complete the [form](#) in Appendix 2.

### **When**

- Office hours: 8 am to 6 pm.
- We will endeavour to issue you with a response within 20 working days.