

One of the Ombudsman's key powers is to help personnel access the Service complaints system by referring their intention to raise a Service complaint to their chain of command. This factsheet provides information about referrals and how the process works.

What is a referral and how do I ask for one?

If you believe you have been wronged in your Service life, you have the right to make a Service complaint.

If you don't want to approach your chain of command directly, you can ask the Ombudsman for help. The Ombudsman does this by writing to your chain of command to let them know that you intend to make a Service complaint. This is known as a referral.

If you want the Ombudsman to make a referral, you will need to complete the application for referral on our website.

Is a referral a Service complaint?

No. A referral is not a Service complaint. A referral also doesn't mean you have to make a formal complaint.

The purpose of a referral is to help you access the complaints system if you don't know who to submit your complaint to, or you don't want to approach your chain of command directly. If you still want to make a formal complaint following a referral, you will need to submit it in writing to the person who receives your referral.

Who is the referral sent to?

The referral will be sent to the team responsible for the oversight of Service complaints for your Service.

- Naval Service – Navy Service Complaints Secretariat
- Army – Army Service Complaints Secretariat
- RAF – Service Complaints Team

They will then work out who the Specified Officer (SO) is that the referral should be sent to. The SO will usually be your Commanding Officer, unless they are involved in your complaint.

Does a referral mean the Ombudsman thinks my complaint should be upheld?

No. When a referral is made, no view is taken about the merits of the complaint you want to make or whether it should be accepted for investigation.

As long as you are a current or former Service person, and you want to make a complaint about a matter related to your Service life, a referral will be made by one of our Enquiries and Referrals Officers.

Does your office monitor how my complaint is handled following a referral?

No. Once a referral has been made, our office will receive notifications about what has happened at key stages e.g. if your complaint was accepted for investigation or not. But we do not monitor how your complaint is being handled. We also can't intervene in the handling of your complaint.

If you want the Ombudsman to use her powers of investigation, you will need to make a separate application.

Why can't the Ombudsman investigate my complaint instead of my Service?

Service complaints are workplace grievances. Before the Ombudsman can investigate your complaint you need to try and resolve it through the internal Service complaints process. This includes appealing the decision you receive if you have the option to do so.

Can I be treated unfairly for coming to the Ombudsman?

No. The Ombudsman's office is open to all Service personnel and no one should be treated unfairly for coming to the Ombudsman.

For more information on the Office of the Service Complaints Ombudsman visit our website

www.scoaf.org.uk

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