

The role of the Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces is to help build a better Service complaints system for all members of the UK Armed Forces. But what does that mean for you? This factsheet provides some information about the key things the Ombudsman and her office can do for current and former serving personnel.

How does the Ombudsman help people access the Service complaints system?

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 can help 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.

A referral is not a Service complaint. You will still need to make your complaint formally, in writing, to your chain of command. For information on referrals, visit our website.

Can the Ombudsman investigate my complaint instead of my Service?

No. 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.

I tried to make a Service complaint but was told it was inadmissible. What can the Ombudsman do for me?

If you receive a decision that says your Service complaint is not admissible you can ask the Ombudsman to review the decision. You have 4 weeks and 2 days from the date the decision is posted or emailed to you to make your application to the Ombudsman.

Any decision the Ombudsman makes about the admissibility of your Service complaint is binding.

I am not happy with how my Service complaint is being handled. What can the Ombudsman do for me?

If your Service complaint is still open (you haven't received a final decision) the Ombudsman only has the power to investigate alleged undue delay. This means that if your complaint is taking longer to resolve than it should, you can ask the Ombudsman to investigate why.

○ My Service complaint has been finalised and I am not happy with the outcome or how it was handled. What can the Ombudsman do for me?

If you have received a final decision on your Service complaint you can ask the Ombudsman to investigate the:

- substance (merits) of the complaint if you think the wrong decision was reached
- handling of the complaint if you think it wasn't handled correctly (i.e. maladministration)

You have 6 weeks and 2 days from the date the final decision is posted or emailed to you to make your application to the Ombudsman. Not all applications to the Ombudsman will be accepted. There is more information about this on our website.

○ Do I need to be still serving to use the Ombudsman's services?

No. The Ombudsman's services are open to both current and former Service personnel. However, there are timeframes for making a Service complaint or making an application to the Ombudsman.

○ I am a Reservist – can I make an application to the Ombudsman?

Yes. The Ombudsman's services are open to all Service personnel.

○ I am a respondent to a Service complaint. How can the Ombudsman help me?

Under the current legislation, the Ombudsman has no power to assist respondents to a Service complaint. This is because the law states that only the person who has made the Service complaint can ask the Ombudsman to use her powers of investigation.

However, if someone who is a respondent to a Service complaint wants to make their own Service complaint, then the Ombudsman can help them access the system. They can also ask the Ombudsman to use her powers of investigation for the complaint that they have made.

For more information on the Office of the Service Complaints Ombudsman visit our website www.scoaf.org.uk

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