



Service
Complaints
Ombudsman
for the Armed Forces

2018

Summary of the 2018 Annual Report of the
Service Complaints Ombudsman

Independence | Impartiality | Integrity

Message from the Ombudsman

I am pleased to present a summary of my Annual Report for 2018.

This summary highlights the key information from the report, including the:

- work undertaken by my office in 2018;
- work of the Service complaints system in 2018; and
- recommendations made in my report.

At the conclusion of the third year of operation of the reformed system, I am still unable to report that the system is efficient, effective and fair. While there has continued to be improvement and an ongoing commitment to ensuring its success, there are still a number of improvements required across both the internal Service complaints system and my office.

I have made 9 further recommendations for improvement. This year, I have also made recommendations for my office. Where appropriate, the recommendations I have made have a collaborative approach. I feel that this is important in order to contribute to the overall effectiveness of the Service complaints process.

My term as Ombudsman will expire on 31 December 2020. With just over 18 months left in post, I am turning my mind to what legacy I want to leave. I am committed to leaving this organisation in a robust position, able to provide the best possible service and meet the challenges ahead. To that end, my focus for the remainder of my term will be on:

- 1. Providing an efficient and high-quality service to complainants**, which includes greater transparency and the reduction of our backlog.
- 2. Raising awareness and knowledge of my role across the Armed Forces**, through improved training, education and increased visibility.
- 3. Seeking to ensure that the powers of the Ombudsman are enhanced to meet the needs of complainants.** This includes seeking the power to investigate matters of undue delay on the behalf of respondents and conduct own initiative investigations.

I hope you find this an interesting and useful document; whether as a companion to the full report or a summary document.



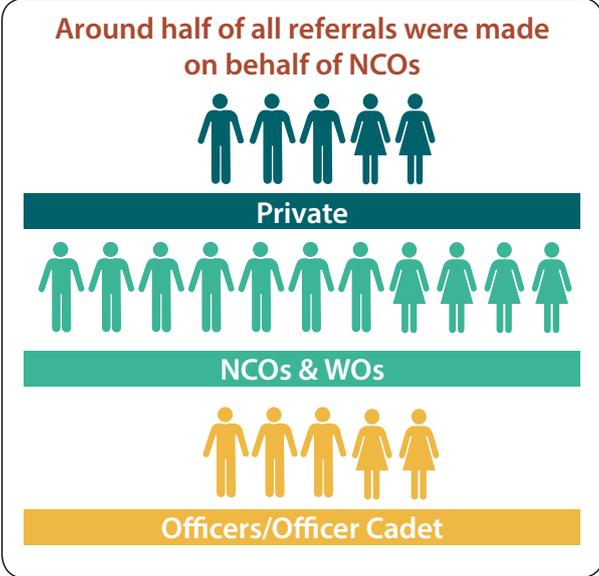
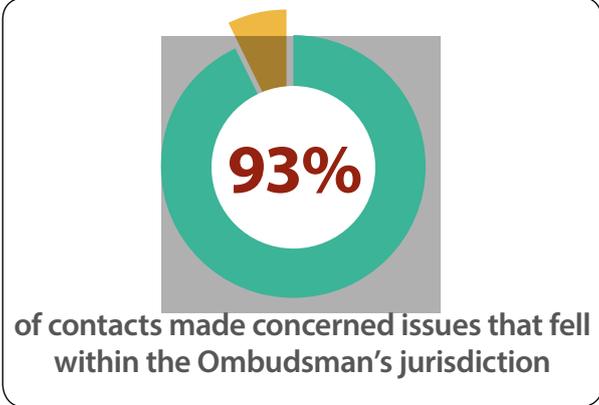
Nicola Williams

Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces



The work of SCOAF in 2018

The Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces (SCOAF) provides independent and impartial oversight of the Service complaints system



346 applications for investigation were received

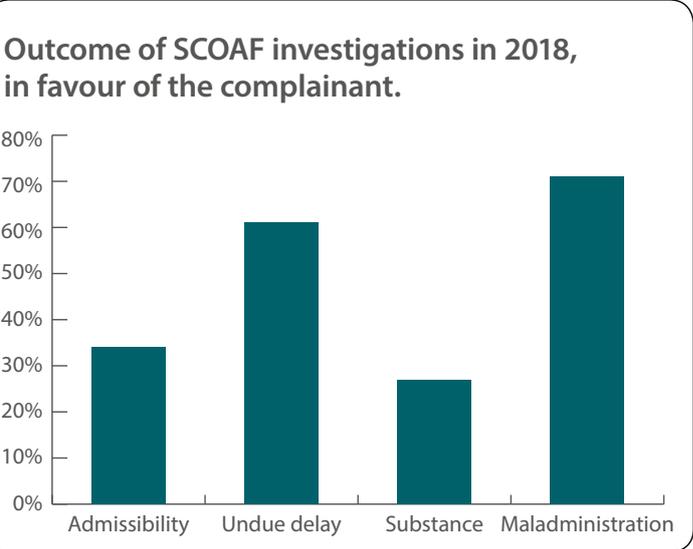
87% of all applications received were accepted for investigation

56% of investigations were completed within the time target.

- Admissibility decision
- Undue delay
- Maladministration
- Substance



- Naval Service
- Army
- RAF



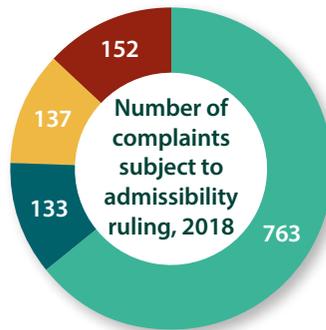
Service complaints in 2018

The Service complaints system is an internal workplace grievance system for members of the Armed Forces in the United Kingdom. The information below reflects the work of this internal process



1,185

complaints were received by the Services in 2018



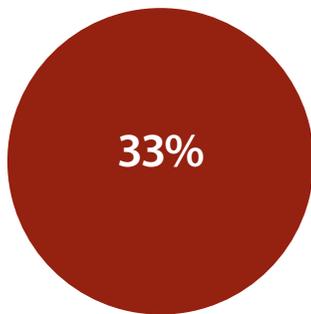
- Inadmissible
- Admissible
- Pending decision
- Withdrawn/Remedied prior to admissibility decision

261 complaints

were also being dealt with informally.

The top 3 areas Service complaints were made about in 2018 were:

Career Management



Bullying, harassment and discrimination

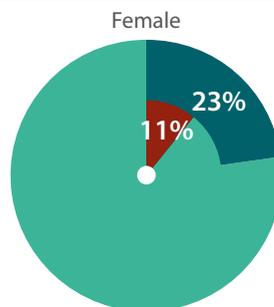


Pay, pensions and allowances

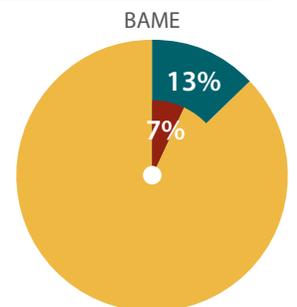


FEMALE Service personnel were overrepresented in the Service complaints system in 2018: **11%** of personnel, **23%** of admissible complaints.

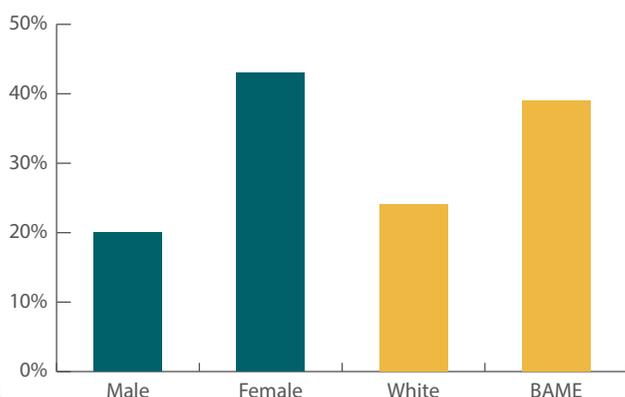
BAME personnel were also overrepresented in the Service complaints system in 2018: **7%** of personnel, **13%** of admissible complaints.



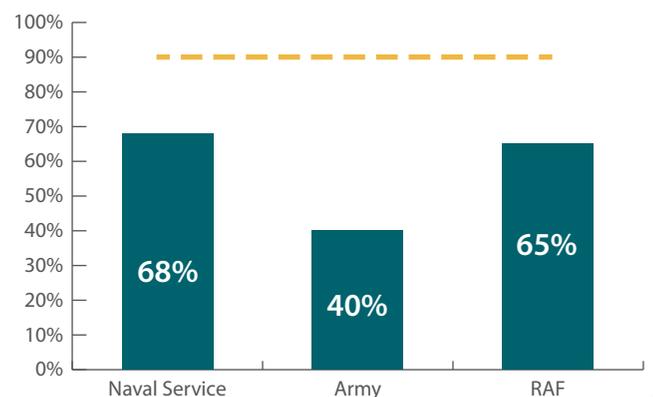
- % of Service Complaints
- % of Service Personnel



Bullying, harassment and discrimination continues to be a more common cause for complaint for female and BAME personnel.



Across the three services, only 50% of complaints were closed within the 24 week target.



9 pre-2016 complaints remain open.

Recommendations

The Ombudsman made the following recommendations in her Annual Report 2018.

Recommendation 3.1

That following the independent internal process review and any expert peer review, a comprehensive proposal for additional resource is prepared by the Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces and submitted to the Ministry of Defence by the end of September 2019, for early consideration. This should address the resources required to:

- reduce the existing allocation backlog
- prevent a new backlog developing
- execute in-depth research and analysis as required by the Ombudsman's reporting function.

Recommendation 3.2

That the Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces and the single Services publish complaint casebooks by the end of April 2020. These casebooks would provide anonymised case studies to provide a greater understanding of the types of complaints made, why complaints are/are not upheld and the outcomes people can expect. This should seek to increase openness and transparency and increase confidence in the system.

Recommendation 3.3

That Service complaints policy should be amended by the end of October 2019 to reflect that decision letters should be sent by email if this is the complainant's preferred method of contact, unless there are specific security issues precluding it.

Recommendation 3.4

That the Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces develops specific guidance on the calculation of consolatory payments by the end of December 2019, and that this guidance is adopted by the single Services by the end of April 2020.

Recommendation 3.5

That the Service Complaints Working Group establishes a process by the end of December 2019 for notifying the Ombudsman of key events under Regulation 6 of The Armed Forces (Service Complaints Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 2015, which adheres to the spirit of the legislation without putting a strain on existing resource.

Recommendation 3.6

That by the end of October 2019, the Ministry of Defence sets a suitable KPI for making admissibility decisions within the existing 2-week target. This KPI should be determined following further work to ascertain why this target is routinely missed. Performance against this target will be measured and reported to the Ombudsman annually.

Recommendation 3.7

That legislation and/or Service complaints policy is amended by the end of April 2020, to allow for the appointment of a Specified Officer with the availability and capacity to take a complaint forward in accordance with the timeframe set out in JSP 831.

Recommendation 3.8

That by the end of April 2020, the single Services establish a pool of permanent Specified Officers and Decision Bodies with full-time responsibility for making admissibility decisions and deciding complaints where capacity issues prevent Commanding Officers from dealing with complaints expeditiously.

Recommendation 3.9

That the Ministry of Defence and the Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces prepare a written agreement by the end of July 2019, outlining when and how formal responses are to be provided to the recommendations made by the Ombudsman in her annual reports. This agreement should also set out how updates on all open recommendations will be provided to the Ombudsman, the content to be included, and the frequency of these.

Consideration should be given to including this agreement in future revisions to legislation.



About the Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces

The Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces provides independent and impartial oversight of the Service complaints system. The primary way in which she does this is through her powers of referral and investigation. Using these powers the Ombudsman can:

- refer a Service person's intention to make a Service complaint to their chain of command
- review a decision by the chain of command to not accept a complaint for investigation or to not allow a complaint to proceed to appeal for a further decision
- investigate allegations of undue delay in the handling of a Service complaint or Service matter
- investigate the substance (merits) of a Service complaint which has completed the internal system
- investigate allegations that there was maladministration in the handling of a Service complaint which has completed the internal system

Contacts

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