

SCOAF Business Plan

2019-2020

Version Control

Date	Version	Details
July 19	1.0	First Edition

Contents

1. Forward by the Ombudsman.....	4.
2. Who we are.....	5.
2.1 Role	5.
2.2 Legislation	5.
2.3 Mission	5.
2.4 Vision	5.
2.5 Values	6.
3. Our Plans: Delivering our objectives	7.
3.1 In-year priorities	9.
3.2 Strategic Objectives.....	11
4. Finance.....	14.
5. People.....	14.
5.1 Training and Education.....	14.
6. Risk and Assurance	15.
6.1 Risk assurance.....	16.

Forward by the Ombudsman



I am pleased to present the Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces business plan for 2019-20

The plan sets out how we intend to continue to deliver against our 5 year strategy which runs from 2016-20: The strategic objectives listed focus primarily on quality of our Service, our independence, the importance of outreach to improve and widen understanding and meeting our legislative requirements.

This plan also outlines the activities we aim to deliver in 2019-20. These activities underpin the strategic objectives and are key in continuing to build an organisation that provides a quality service, where we listen and provide fair and reasonable outcomes in a timely manner.

The key themes are:

- 1. Providing an efficient and high-quality service to complainants**, this 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. Improving services within my office**, this includes reviewing existing services as well as introducing new services such as the application portal and training video.

We are a learning organisation, and I believe we are moving in the right direction. As highlighted against my strategic objectives, much work has been done to improve the service this office provides. However we are not complacent; we constantly seek to improve, develop and raise our standards and under my tenure will continue to do so.

Nicola Williams, Ombudsman

Who we are

The Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces (SCOAF) was established on 1st January 2016 as part of wide reforms to the Service complaints process. This replaced the Office of the Service Complaints Commissioner which ran from 2008-2015.

Role

The role of the Ombudsman is to provide independent and impartial oversight of the handling of the Service complaints system for members of the UK Armed Forces. The Ombudsman achieves this through 3 main functions:

- Helping Service personnel access the complaint system
- Investigating
- Reporting to Parliament

The Ombudsman cannot deal with enquiries or complaints that fall outside of their jurisdiction – this includes members of the public or family members' matters.

Legislation

The legislation governing the role of the Ombudsman includes:

- [Armed Forces \(Service Complaints and Financial Assistance\) Act 2015](#)
- [The Armed Forces \(Service Complaints\) Regulations 2015](#)
- [The Armed Forces \(Service Complaints Miscellaneous Provisions\) Regulations 2015](#)
- [The Armed Forces \(Service Complaints Ombudsman Investigations\) Regulations 2015](#)

Mission

To provide independent oversight and investigations in support of an effective Service complaints process for members of the UK Armed Forces.

Vision

The Ombudsman's vision is that all Service personnel have access to and confidence in a Service complaints system that is efficient, effective and fair.

Values

SCOAF's values have been developed in close consultation with our staff so we all have a shared understanding of the type of ombudsman service we want to be.

The values are:

- **Independence** – we are independent from the organisation we investigate, holding them to account for service failure or injustice
- **Impartiality** – The SCOAF is fully impartial – all investigations are undertaken on their own merits. We do not take sides.
- **Integrity** - The SCOAF ensures they are consistent in their approach, adhering to policy and process and acting within the confines of jurisdiction.

Our plans 2019-20: delivering our objectives

The following pages set out our in-year priorities and strategic objectives. The main priorities for this year are:

1. Review existing resource:

Reviews of SCOAF resource are regularly undertaken however a high turnover of staff and existing backlog has led to the decision that a thorough review of resource and existing process will be undertaken to identify what new measures should be implemented to ensure the office has the tools in place to meet its statutory function.

2. Develop an application portal.

Moving to an online application portal is in keeping with the aim of all members of the International Ombudsman Association to make digital a default way of working. An online portal is not only easier for many individuals to use, long-term it will allow individuals to receive automatic updates on the progress of their complaint. While the benefit is primarily to the complainant, the portal will also remove the need for SCOAF staff to undertake a range of basic administrative tasks including scanning and manual case creation.

While the portal will be the default method for application, existing application methods will continue to be provided for those who do not use technology or who need additional support to complete their application.

3. Develop and Issue a training video:

Continued feedback from complainants via questionnaires and focus groups suggest that there is still a gap in knowledge on relation to the role and powers of the Ombudsman. To try and go some way to improve this, a training video will be developed which talks through our role and powers and will be available for all 3 Services and across all ranks.

4. Develop guidance on the calculation of consolatory payments:

There is a concern relating to lack of proportionality in calculating consolatory payments for complainants who have been subject to delays, stress or hurt feelings. In order to aid the single Services the intention is to produce guidance on the calculation of consolatory payments.

5. Outreach

Outreach remains one of SCOAF's most important objectives year-on-year. This is to ensure that the:

- maximum number of personnel know who we are and what we do
- Ombudsman's message is delivered in an unfiltered way
- opportunity exists for the Ombudsman and their staff to gain a deeper understanding of how the Armed Forces work

6. Strategic overhaul of SCOAF statistical analysis

It is the role of the ombudsman and her predecessor's¹ to provide independent and impartial oversight of the handling of the Service complaints system; and robust statistical evidence underpins much of what she does. The statistics and analysis it produces gives a genuine understanding the Service complaints process and what SCOAF publishes through the Quarterly Statistical Report and Annual Report enables stakeholders to evaluate both (i) significant issues in Service life suffered by Service personnel and (ii) how well the Service complaints process works.

Most of the statistics in both the quarterly statistical report and the annual report have changed little in design or scope for three years and some remained virtually unchanged in ten years. Furthermore, recent questions raised by amongst other the HCDC have highlighted gaps in SCOAF's statistical analysis. A strategic overhaul of the statistical analysis will look to identify the scale, scope and importance of the gaps and will equip the ombudsman to better meet the requirements of her responsibilities.

¹ Service Complaints Commissioner
Version 1.0

In-Year Objectives [Priorities] 2019-20

Specific Activity	Work to be undertaken	Timing of delivery	Update
1. Ensure sufficient resource is in place to: (a) ensure investigations can be carried out expeditiously (b) the office can run effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Process review completed. Recommendations made and will be reviewed - External expert peer review - Reduce backlog 	<p>March 2019</p> <p>June 2019</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	Complete
2. Application Portal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design a bespoke portal separate from the SCOAF Website - Design application forms ensuring plain English, including additional features to enhance accessibility - Test the portal - Go-live 	October 2019.	"On-Hold" while review of CMS is undertaken. Potential date for deliver July 2020
3. Training videos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design new training material which highlights the Ombudsman's role and powers and will be aimed at all levels across the 3 Services 	May 2019	Date moved due to external resource changes. New date Oct 2019
4. Develop specific guidance on the calculation of compensatory payments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Produce a draft guidance document for comment from other Ombudsman and HOCS Finance. - Publish finalised guide 	<p>August 19</p> <p>Dec 19</p>	
5. Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New TV adverts on BFBS, in addition to the existing radio adverts - Increased media coverage in Service-specific publications - Development of new presentation to be delivered on all outreach visits - Development of a workshop that can be used by all staff as part of roadshows or other visits 	March 2020	
6. Strategic overhaul of SCOAF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Run a scoping exercise on gaps in SCOAF statistical 	- August 2019	-

statistical analysis	analysis and associated data collection requirement <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Design and publish a new SCOAF quarterly statistical report- Design and be ready to publish a new set of Annual Report Statistical Tables	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- October 2019- March 2020	
----------------------	--	---	--

Strategic Objectives 2016-2020

Strategic Objective	In 2018 we have.....
<p>1. Provide an independent, transparent and accountable Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces</p> <p>1.1 Monitor, scrutinise and report on the operation of the Service complaints system to Parliament;</p> <p>1.2 Collect, process, analyse and disseminate statistics in line with professional best practice;</p> <p>1.3 Be transparent in our operation and ensure we deliver value for money;</p> <p>1.4 Improve our service by making it easier for Service personnel to access the Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces;</p> <p>1.5 Deal with enquiries and referrals efficiently, minimizing delay and meeting timeliness targets.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exceeded our timeliness KPI for referrals. Our Enquiries and Referrals Team are the frontline of our organisation. In addition to handling all 872 enquiries that were made in 2018, the team made 99% of referrals within seven working days. This is above the 90% target for processing referrals and the third consecutive year the team has exceeded the KPI. • Revised our application forms. Our application forms were redesigned following feedback in 2017 and this process continued in 2018. The design of our forms was tweaked and we also started work on an online application portal. This will make it easier for complainants to complete their application forms. • Changed our email and web addresses. Our old addresses used the full 'Service Complaints Ombudsman' title. This meant that individuals with low literacy levels had difficulty successfully sending an email or finding our website. Both have been shortened to 'SCOAF', which is in line with our branding on social media. • Published Annual Report 2018. This was the second Annual Report for our organisation. The Annual Report is the primary way in which the office is transparent and accountable to Parliament and the public.
<p>2. Deliver timely, comprehensive investigations for applicants, exercising our legislative powers in a transparent, efficient manner to ensure guardianship of the Service complaints process by the Ombudsman.</p> <p>2.1 Undertake thorough investigations in line with our commitment to independence, impartiality and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamlined our investigation process. We removed the initial case review from our processes for substance and maladministration investigations. This removed a layer of duplication which contributed to internal delays and realigned complainant expectations.

<p>integrity;</p> <p>2.2 Establish, develop and adhere to policies and processes, in line with legislation;</p> <p>2.3 Deliver specific, clear and consistent recommendations;</p> <p>2.4 Deliver on our commitment to complete investigations within timeliness targets;</p> <p>2.5 Engage with legal challenges to our findings and report on outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failed to meet our allocated timeframes for investigations. All KPIs are set at a target to complete 90% of investigations within the stated timeframe. In 2018: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 72 % of admissibility reviews were completed within 17 days 78 % of undue delay investigations were completed within 17 days < 5% of substance (merits) investigations were completed within 100 days < 5% of maladministration investigations were completed within 100 days
<p>3. Provide information, education and outreach with the Armed Forces and wider stakeholders to promote the Service complaints system.</p> <p>3.1 Actively seek to develop effective and enduring working relationships with stakeholders;</p> <p>3.2 Take a proactive role in the international Ombudsman community;</p> <p>3.3 Develop tools to educate users on how the Ombudsman can help them;</p> <p>3.4 Proactively promote the Ombudsman role and wider Service complaints process;</p> <p>3.5 Adopt innovative approaches to implement and develop a digital presence for the Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launched our new website. The new website is responsive and includes a self-help tool for individuals looking to find out how the Ombudsman can help them. Released a new print campaign. This included a simpler tagline to help people better understand the role of our office. Alternate versions of our posters are now available, in different sizes, to meet the needs of all literacy levels. Ran new ads on BFBS radio. These were both general ads to raise awareness of our office and targeted ads to raise awareness of our new email and web address. This will continue in 2019 and expand to television adverts. Held our inaugural Stakeholder Symposium. The Ombudsman presented her Annual Report to all of our non-Service stakeholders and listened to their thoughts and concerns about

	<p>the process. We will be looking to build upon this in 2019.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued to engage with Ombudsman Association (OA) working groups. SCOAF is a full member of the OA. Representatives from our office participate in each of the OA working groups. One of our Senior Investigators was part of the working group that developed guidelines for member organisations to report on the Service Standards Framework in 2018.
<p>4. Be a learning organisation and develop the capabilities (knowledge, skills and behaviours) required to achieve our priorities now and in the future.</p> <p>4.1 Monitor recommendations, trends and themes to shape improvements to the complaints process;</p> <p>4.2 Work with the Services and the Ministry of Defence to see that lessons are implemented swiftly and efficiently;</p> <p>4.3 Review and develop our processes, making required changes to ensure that the new system succeeds;</p> <p>4.4 Proactively build our capability to ensure that the Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces is able to deliver its objectives;</p> <p>4.5 Continue to invest in our people and provide opportunities to meet appropriate professional standards.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved funds for Plain Language Training. Funds were approved for all of our staff to receive training in plain language. This will take place in 2019. Introduced Fee Earning Investigators. An initial cadre of 5 fee earning investigators started in 2018. The fee earners were introduced as a flexible resource to help manage the current backlog and to handle cases post-backlog when permanent investigators are at capacity. Streamlined our investigation process. We removed the initial case review from our processes for substance and maladministration investigations. This removed a layer of duplication which contributed to internal delays and realigned complainant expectations. A Process Review was completed in March 2019 and the recommendations will be taken forward in 2019-20.

Finance

The SCOAF budget is provided by Defence and is bid for annually based on the previous year's activity and any future one off projects. The business costs cover machinery, accommodation, IT, training etc.

Table [1] – SCOAF ABC ²Allocation

	18/19	19/20
Staff Costs	1,704,251	1,414,855
Business Costs	702,639	584,527
Fee Earner	156,060	159,181

People

SCOAF has 28 active³ positions: 25 permanent and 3 fixed term. A pool of fee earning investigators is also used on an ad-hoc basis to carry out maladministration and/or substance investigations.

The aim for the year ahead it to re-look at our current manpower, review and identify further resources measures. An internal process review is ongoing with the intention of undertaking an external review during May/June.

Table [2] –Position Profile

Employee Type	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23
Civilian	24	24	24	24	24
Fee Earner	5	5	5	5	5
Crown Appointee	1	1	1	1	1
Fixed Term	0	3	3	3	3

Table [3] – Post Profile (for permanent posts)

Employee Type	Posts	Vacant
Chief of Operations	1	0
Head of Investigations	1	0
Senior Investigator	6	2
Investigator	4	0
Enquiries/Referrals	3	1
Chief of Staff	1	0
Business Support	5	0

² ABC – Activity Based Costing

³ By “active” we mean open positions which may or may not be filled.

Statistician	1	0
Administrative Support	2	0

Table [x] – Manpower Profile⁴

Employee Type	Posts	Filled	Vacant
Civilian	24	21	3
Fee Earner	5	5	0
Crown Appointee	1	1	1
Fixed Term	3	1	2

Training and Education

All SCOAF staff complete mandatory training covering areas such as Health and Safety, Information Management, diversity and inclusion. Completion of mandatory training is monitored by the business manager.

Investigative staff have to undertake Mental Health First Aid and the Professional award in Ombudsman and Complaints Handling Practice via Queen Margaret University.

In conjunction with the above all staff are expected to identify and complete courses relevant to their role and continued CPD, in conjunction with broader learning such as visits to Service and MOD establishments.

Risk and Assurance

{provide information on risk and mitigation}

Table [4] – SCOAF top 3 risks

Risk	Mitigation
SCOAF is not appropriately staffed to meet objectives. Low employee morale and engagement, impact on staff retention and recruitment	Ensure all vacancies are filled as swiftly as possible Undertake benchmarking with other Ombuds organisation Review current staffing levels Identify potential contingency measures
Current SCOAF backlog relating to maladministration and substance applications increases significantly	Undertake a process review Continue to be transparent and ensure all complainants are kept updated Look at identifying additional resource
SCOAF is not seen to add value (reputational)	Outreach program Act on feedback received where appropriate and within jurisdiction Be accessible

⁴ As at April 2019
Version 1.0

--	--

Holding to Account

The SCOAF holds monthly management boards which address key issues, risks and trends. All actions are recorded.

All investigative work is peer reviewed to ensure it meets jurisdiction in line with the SCOAF internal operations manual.