

Everything you need to know about SCOAF referrals



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This pamphlet explains everything you need to know about the Ombudsman's referrals process.



What is a referral?

A referral is a letter from SCOAF that says you wish to make a Service Complaint. This will usually be sent to your chain of command or former chain of command if you are no longer serving.

A referral is not a formal Service Complaint. The purpose of a referral is to help you access the complaints system if you do not 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.



How long do I have to ask for a referral?

You can ask the Ombudsman to refer a matter at any time. The time limit to make a Service Complaint is usually 3 months from the date of the alleged wrong (or the date you discovered you were wronged). If you are coming close to that time we recommend you submit your complaint in writing (signed and dated) to your chain of command without delay. If you make a complaint directly to your chain of command the Ombudsman won't then be able to make a referral as there is nothing to refer.

A referral does not "stop the clock" on the time limits for making a Service Complaint. If the Ombudsman makes a referral, it does not indicate that your complaint will be accepted for investigation as a formal Service Complaint.

Please note: The Ombudsman cannot make referrals about issues that happened before 1 January 2008. This is because a Service person can only make a Service Complaint if the matter they are complaining about occurred when they were subject to Service law. Service law commenced on 1 January 2008. Prior to this, Service personnel were subject to the laws of their individual Services (Army Act 1955, Navy Discipline Act 1957 and the Air Force Act 1955). [It may be possible to raise your historical complaint using the MOD complaints process.](#)



How do I ask for a referral?

If you don't want to approach your chain of command directly, you can ask the Ombudsman for help.

If you want the Ombudsman to make a referral, you will need to complete the [application for referral](#) on our website.

Service Complaints Ombudsman
for the Armed Forces

Application for referral

A referral is a letter from the Service Complaints Ombudsman to the Armed Forces (SCOP) in your Service that asks you to make a Service Complaint. It will be sent to the Service Complaints Secretariat for your Service. They will then observe and act on it. This will usually be your chain of command or former chain of command if you are no longer serving.

SCOP can't make referrals about issues that happened before 2008.

A referral

- can't be made for current or former Service personnel
- is not a formal Service Complaint
- places a legal obligation on the Service to look at the individual's case and make a formal complaint and get the grievance sorted
- can't be made if you have already submitted a formal complaint or writing to your chain of command about the same issue
- requires SCOP to be updated after key events
- is not the start of an investigation by SCOP
- does not mean SCOP finds that any complaint made following a referral should be upheld
- does not prevent informal resolution

A Service Complaint usually needs to be made within 2 months of the date of the wrong being complained about. Submitting the application late or a referral 2008-2022 may be closed on this date. The only way to open the door to a formal complaint is if you submit a statement of complaint to your chain of command.

If you need further information or assistance to complete this form please phone 020 7877 3450 or email contact@scop.org.uk

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What happens once you receive my application?

Once we receive your Service application form you will be sent an acknowledgement within 2 working days. Your application will be processed by the Enquiries and Referrals Team within 7 working days from the date of your acknowledgement.

A referral letter will be sent to the relevant Service with the following details:

- Your full name, including rank
- Your Service number
- Your contact details (email, telephone number and address)
- The name of your current unit or former unit, if you're no longer serving
- A brief overview of the issue you want us to refer
- Our reference number

Please note: It is important that we can contact you once you have submitted an application. If we can't contact you, we may be unable to process your application or there may be delays in making a referral.



What can I expect after a referral has been made?

The referral will be sent to the team responsible for oversight of Service Complaints for your Service:

- Royal Navy – CNLS Personnel Casework
- 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.

The SO or someone acting on his or her behalf will contact you to confirm that you wish to submit a formal Service Complaint. This is done by making a written statement of complaint, normally on an [Annex F to JSP831 form](#).

If you do not already have an Assisting Officer (AO), you will be offered the opportunity to have one. The AO is there to assist and guide you through the Service Complaints process.

Do you investigate my complaint or monitor how it is investigated?

The Ombudsman cannot investigate your complaint – it must go through the internal Service Complaints process. Once a referral has been made, the Ombudsman will not be involved in the handling of your complaint.

The Ombudsman 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 or provide updates. We also cannot intervene in the handling of your complaint. However, you will have the option to come back



to SCOAF at a later point and ask the Ombudsman to use their powers of investigation under the following circumstances:

- **Admissibility Review:** If your complaint is not accepted for investigation because it is ruled out of time, or otherwise excluded, you can ask the Ombudsman to review this decision. The Ombudsman can also review a decision to not allow an appeal to proceed.
- **Undue delay:** If your complaint is ongoing and you feel there has been undue delay in resolving it, you can ask the Ombudsman to investigate this delay.
- **Maladministration:** If your complaint has completed the internal process and you feel that there is something wrong with the way it was dealt with, you can ask the Ombudsman to investigate your allegations about what went wrong in the handling of your complaint.
- **Substance:** If your complaint has completed the internal process and you feel that the decision reached was incorrect and unreasonable, you can ask the Ombudsman to carry out a new investigation of your complaint.

Please note: Not all applications for investigation are accepted and the Ombudsman can only conduct a new investigation in certain circumstances.



Where can I get more information?

For information on the Ombudsman's role, powers and processes and how to make an application for referral, you can contact us at:

☎ 020 7877 3450

✉ contact@scoaf.org.uk

🌐 www.scoaf.org.uk

@ SCOAF_UK

For information on the Service Complaints process read [Redress of Individual Grievances: Service Complaints \(JSP831\)](#).
