

They may be someone who was aware of an issue or events without being directly involved. A witness will not be criticised by the Decision Body.

## Frequently asked questions

### What if I am worried about the Complainant's behaviour?

If a Respondent has concerns about someone's behaviour they should inform their Assisting Officer, Service Discipline or Personal Support staff as soon as possible. Alternatively, the Service Complaints Team Respondents' Champion can be informed, their details can be found on the SharePoint page shown below.

### If I am unhappy with the Service Complaints investigation, what can I do?

These concerns should be raised with the Assisting Officer or unit Service Discipline staff in the first instance. However, if you feel unable to do this or you feel your concerns have not been addressed, you may contact the Respondents' Champion.

### Do I have to be involved in the Service Complaint?

For the Service Complaints process to be efficient, effective and fair, it is essential that a Decision Body (or Appeal Body) have all the evidence and information required to make their decision. Therefore, serving personnel are required to make themselves available to the process. Ex-serving personnel cannot be compelled (forced) to take part in the process.

### Should I seek legal advice?

There is no requirement to do so, as the process is non-litigious, meaning it is not a legal case being heard in a court or tribunal. Should you choose to appoint a legal advisor, the financial costs will not be reimbursed.

### I am finding the process stressful, who can help me?

Your Assisting Officer should usually be your first port of call. Help may also be sought from Service Discipline staff, Personal Support staff, the Padre or SSAFA.

You can also talk to line management, but remember to maintain confidentiality – meaning don't tell your line manager any details of the Service Complaint itself.

### What happens if the Service Complaint is upheld?

If the Service Complaint is upheld the Decision (or Appeal) Body will decide what redress is appropriate. 'Redress' means follow up action, and may or may not apply to a Respondent.

A Decision Body cannot take action directly against a Respondent, but could ask their Commanding Officer to consider doing so.

A Respondent cannot be made to do anything they do not wish to do, such as apologise to someone.

### Contacts & further information

[RAF Service Complaints Team - Home](#)

[RAF Mediation - Home](#)

<https://www.scoaf.org.uk/>

<https://www.ssafa.org.uk/>

[My Service Complaint Journey](#)

[HR Portal - HR, SD and PS contacts](#)

### Respondents' Champion email:

[Air-COSPers-PolSCTRespondChamp@mod.gov.uk](mailto:Air-COSPers-PolSCTRespondChamp@mod.gov.uk)



## Guide 3

## RAF Service Complaints Guide

## A Guide for Respondents in a Service Complaint

Last updated – Jun 23



## About this guidance

Every member of the Royal Air Force has the right to submit a Service Complaint if they believe they have been wronged in a matter which relates to their service.

The aim of the Service Complaints system is to provide personnel with easy access to a process they can use to raise a grievance (an issue they wish to complain about). This process is designed to be as efficient, effective and fair as possible.

Although not every Service Complaint will have a Respondent, such as those that relate to policy issues, the Service Complaints Team recognise that being named as a Respondent may be daunting or challenging for some people. Therefore, this guide aims to give an overview of what a Respondent should expect from the process and, importantly, where and how to seek support and guidance.

### What is a Respondent?

A Respondent is someone identified by the Decision Body (defined in the "Who's who?" section of this guide) who might be criticised in the Service Complaints decision. A Respondent is usually identified early in the process, but this may occur later on as the case progresses. A Respondent has a right to an Assisting Officer and will take part in any Case Hearings. They receive a redacted copy of the Casefile and may provide a response to this if they wish. 'Redacted' involves removing confidential or legally privileged information.

### What to expect, what to do and what not to do

A Respondent will be offered the services of an Assisting Officer - they may choose someone themselves or ask Service Discipline staff to help.

Service Complaints are confidential and may not be discussed with anyone that is not involved. A Respondent should refrain from contacting other parties in the Service Complaint.

They should use Service Discipline staff and an Assisting Officer as points of contact instead.

Service Discipline staff will explain the process, including document disclosure and Case Hearing details.

A Respondent will receive a copy of the original Service Complaint and the Acceptance Letter, which outlines the elements of the Service Complaint that will be considered as part of the process.

Once the Service Complaint has been decided on, the Respondent will receive a copy of the Case Hearing Record (or a Decision Letter if there is no Case Hearing).

Occasionally, a Complainant may decide to lodge an appeal to do with one or more elements of the Service Complaint decision, or process, they are not satisfied with. If this happens, the Respondent will be informed and will be regularly updated until an appeal decision has been made.

### Who's who?

#### The Complainant

The Complainant is the Service person who submits the Service Complaint. They are entitled to an Assisting Officer and will receive regular updates on the progress of their Service Complaint from Service Discipline staff or, sometimes, the Service Complaints Team.

#### The Acceptance Officer

Previously known as the 'Specified Officer', the Acceptance Officer is an independent, specially trained, experienced senior officer responsible for deciding whether or not a new Service Complaint may be accepted, meaning it is capable of being processed through the Service Complaints process.

### The Central Acceptance Team (CAT)

The CAT is the section of the RAF Service Complaints Team that supports the Acceptance Officer with the Acceptance process. Service Complaints may be sent directly to the CAT by email, or via Service Discipline.

### Assisting Officer

An Assisting Officer is appointed to support and assist a Complainant, Respondent or Participant in a Service Complaint. More information can be found in the Assisting Officers guide.

### Decision Body

The Decision Body is the person, or people, appointed by the Defence Council to decide the outcome of a Service Complaint. They are highly experienced senior officers who have been trained for their role. They are independent and have no previous connection with the complaint.

A Decision Body may, occasionally, decide on a Service Complaint in conjunction with an Independent Member from outside the Armed Forces.

### Participants and witnesses

Not every Service Complaint will have Participants or Witnesses.

A Participant is a person named in a Service Complaint. They have the right to an Assisting Officer and will receive copies of some, but not all, case papers. A Participant is required to attend a Case Hearing if one is held, and may be asked questions. Participants are different from witnesses, as they would have been part of the events that led to the Service Complaint. A Participant will not be criticised by the Decision Body.

A witness may be asked to answer questions or give evidence to help with the decision-making process.