

When the Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces (SCOAF) can help



When SCOAF can help

If you:

- want to make a Service Complaint*, SCOAF can help you access the system by making a referral
- have submitted a Service Complaint, but think the time it is taking to progress it is unreasonable, you can ask the Ombudsman to investigate undue delay
- have received a decision from a Specified Officer at the Central Admissibility Team that your Service Complaint, or aspects of it, are inadmissible, you can ask the Ombudsman to review that admissibility decision*
- have submitted an appeal of the Decision Body decision on your complaint and received a decision from the Service that your appeal, or aspects of it, are inadmissible, you can ask the Ombudsman to review that admissibility decision*
- have received a **final determination** on your complaint (see below) and are unhappy with the outcome, you can ask the Ombudsman to investigate* the substance and/or maladministration in the handling of your Service Complaint.

Final determination

A complaint is finally determined when:

1. A decision has been made on the Service Complaint by a Decision Body, which the complainant has appealed and been given a final determination by an Appeal Body. The **final determination** in this situation is the Appeal Body determination letter;
- OR**
2. A decision has been made on the Service Complaint by a Decision Body, which the complainant has no grounds to appeal on. The **final determination** in this situation is the Decision Body decision letter;
- OR**
3. The complainant appealed the Decision Body's decision, but it has been decided that the appeal cannot proceed (is inadmissible) and the

* Time limits apply. See relevant section

complainant does not ask the Ombudsman to review that admissibility decision. In this situation, the **final determination** is the appeal admissibility decision letter;

OR

4. The complainant submitted an appeal of the Decision Body's decision, which was found to be inadmissible, and the complainant asked the Ombudsman to review that appeal admissibility decision. If the Ombudsman agrees that the appeal is inadmissible, the **final determination** is the Ombudsman's appeal admissibility decision.

Time limits





- Service Complaint:** a complaint should normally[†] be submitted three months from the day on which the matter being complained about happened, or if it happened over a period of time, three months from the last day it happened. Asking the Ombudsman for a referral does not 'stop the clock' on this time limit.
- Admissibility review:** an application to SCOAF must be submitted within four weeks and two days of the admissibility decision.
- Investigation:** an application to SCOAF for a substance and/or maladministration application must be submitted within six weeks and two days of the **final determination**.

A Service Complaint or application to SCOAF can be made after the time limit has passed if it is considered 'just and equitable' to allow it. However, there is no definition of 'just and equitable'. For applications to SCOAF that are outside of the time limit, we view 'just and equitable' as meaning right, fair and reasonable. We ask complainants to give reasons for their application being out of time, which we then take into consideration when deciding whether or not to accept the application for review/investigation.

[†] Different time limits apply to matters that are, or are capable of being, pursued as a claim to an Employment Tribunal under the Equality Act 2010. See 1.3 of [JSP 831 \(Policy\)](#) for further details.

Further information and contact details

For further information about how and when the Ombudsman can help, you can contact us at:

-  0300 369 0689
Our enquiry line is open Monday-Friday 09:00-16:30
-  contact@scoaf.org.uk
-  www.scoaf.org.uk
-  @ SCOAF_UK

If you would like to make an application to SCOAF, please visit the relevant page on our [website](#).

Information about how to make a Service Complaint can be found on [GOV.UK](#).

Policy, procedure and guidance for the Service Complaints process, including details of time limits for bringing complaints, are set out in [JSP 831 - Redress of Individual Grievances: Service Complaints](#).