

# Everything you need to know about SCOAF referrals



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

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## What is a referral?



Individuals usually raise a complaint via their single Service Secretariat. If they do not want to do this, they can ask the Ombudsman to refer their Service Complaint directly to the single Service Central Admissibility Team (CAT).

A referral is a letter from the Ombudsman that says you want to make a Service Complaint. It places a legal obligation on the Service to find out if you want to make a formal complaint and get the process started.

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 how to make your complaint, or who to.

## 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 three months from the date of the alleged wrong.

If you are coming close to that time, we recommend you submit your complaint in writing (signed and dated) to your Service's CAT (contact details can be found below).

If you make a complaint directly to the CAT, the Ombudsman won't then be able to make a referral.

If the Ombudsman makes a referral, it does not mean that your complaint will be accepted for investigation as a formal Service Complaint. **A referral does not "stop the clock" on the time limits for making a 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 happened when they were subject to Service law. Service law began 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 (see 'Where can I get more information?', below).

## How do I ask for a referral?

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

## What happens once you receive my application?

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You will be sent an acknowledgement within two working days. Your application will be processed by the Enquiries and Referrals team. You will be given a decision about whether your complaint will be referred within seven working days of us receiving a **completed** application.

If we do refer your complaint, a referral letter will be sent to the relevant Service CAT 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 referred
- Our reference number

You will be sent a copy of the referral letter for information.

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

## What can I expect after a referral has been made?



The CAT will contact you to explain the process, how to make a formal Service Complaint and what will happen next.

To make a formal Service Complaint, you need to submit a written statement of complaint. Service personnel are encouraged to do this using the 'My Complaint app', which is accessed through Defence Gateway.

If you cannot use the My Complaint app, you can submit a Service Complaint in writing using an 'Annex F form'. Links can be found below in the 'Where can I get more information?' section.

If you make a formal Service Complaint, the CAT will appoint a Specified Officer (SO), who will be responsible for deciding whether or not your complaint is admissible as a Service Complaint.

The SO, or someone acting on their behalf, should contact you to discuss your complaint and the redress you want. If you do not already have an Assisting Officer (AO), the SO should ask you if you want one. The AO is there to assist and guide you through the Service Complaints process.

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### 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: for example, if your complaint is accepted for investigation or not. But we do not monitor how your complaint is being handled or provide updates and we cannot intervene in the handling of your complaint.

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, or any aspect of it, is not accepted for investigation by the SO (found to be inadmissible), you can ask the Ombudsman to review that decision.
- **Undue delay:** If your complaint is ongoing and you feel there has been undue delay in the handling of it, you can ask the Ombudsman to investigate that.
- **Appeal admissibility review:** If you are unhappy with the decision you receive on your Service Complaint, it is likely you will be able to appeal that decision. The Secretariat for your Service will send you a decision about whether your appeal can proceed to the next stage of the complaint

process. If your appeal is not allowed (inadmissible), you can ask the Ombudsman to review that decision.

If your complaint has completed the internal process and you have received a final decision you can ask the Ombudsman to investigate:

- **Substance:** This means what your complaint was actually about. If you feel the final decision on your Service Complaint is wrong, you can ask the Ombudsman to investigate your complaint.
- **Maladministration:** If you feel that the way your Service Complaint was dealt with was wrong or improper, you can ask the Ombudsman to investigate your allegations about what went wrong in the handling of your complaint.

**Please note:** The Ombudsman is not a third level of appeal. Not all applications for investigation are accepted and the Ombudsman can only conduct a new investigation in certain circumstances. Any investigation will not look at whether your complaint should have been upheld or not.

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## Where can I get more information?



### SCOAF

For information on the Ombudsman's role, powers and processes, you can contact us at:

☎ 0300 369 0689  
Our enquiry line is open Monday-Friday 09:00-16:30

✉ [contact@scoaf.org.uk](mailto:contact@scoaf.org.uk)

🌐 [www.scoaf.org.uk](http://www.scoaf.org.uk)

@ SCOAF\_UK

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

If you would prefer to complete an application for referral form, rather than submitting your application online, a .pdf version of the form can be found on the '[Application forms, factsheets and guidance](#)' page of our website.

## Services

### Royal Navy

General enquiries:

✉ [NAVYPEOPLE-SCLCOMPLAINTSADMIN@mod.gov.uk](mailto:NAVYPEOPLE-SCLCOMPLAINTSADMIN@mod.gov.uk)

CAT (to submit a Service Complaint (Annex F) and for admissibility queries):

✉ [NAVYPEOPLE-SCLSUBMITCOMPLAINT@mod.gov.uk](mailto:NAVYPEOPLE-SCLSUBMITCOMPLAINT@mod.gov.uk)

### Army

General enquiries: ✉ [apsg-armyscsec-enquiries@mod.gov.uk](mailto:apsg-armyscsec-enquiries@mod.gov.uk)

CAT (to submit a Service Complaint (Annex F) and for admissibility queries): ✉ [APSG-ArmySCSec-Group@mod.gov.uk](mailto:APSG-ArmySCSec-Group@mod.gov.uk)

### RAF

General enquiries: ✉ [air-people-services-sctgpmlbx@mod.gov.uk](mailto:air-people-services-sctgpmlbx@mod.gov.uk)

CAT (to submit a Service Complaint (Annex F) and for admissibility queries): ✉ [air-people-services-sctcat@mod.gov.uk](mailto:air-people-services-sctcat@mod.gov.uk)

## The Ministry of Defence (MOD) complaints procedure

🌐 Visit [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)

For historical complaints, you should write to the MOD's Central Correspondence Unit. This can be done by using the online form at: [Contact the Ministry of Defence](#).

Alternatively, you can submit your complaint by post to:

Central Correspondence Unit  
MOD Main Building (Zone 5A)  
Whitehall  
London SW1A 2HB

Your complaint will be forwarded to the department within the MOD that is best placed to respond.

## The Service Complaints process and My Complaint app

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

Details of the My Complaint app and how to access it can be found on [defnet](#).

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