



**General Teaching Council
for Northern Ireland**

Promoting Teacher Professionalism

Complaints Procedure

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Complaints Policy

Introduction

The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) is committed to providing a high quality service to teachers, to other stakeholders and to everyone we deal with. Our aim is to get things right first time. In order to do this we need you to give us any comments about our service, and to tell us when we get things wrong. We want to help you resolve your complaint as quickly as possible.

If you are dissatisfied with the service you have received, please tell us and we will do our best to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. Your feedback can help us to put things right and improve our services in the future.

We treat as a complaint any expression of dissatisfaction with our service which calls for a response. We listen to your complaints, treat them seriously, and learn from them so that we can continuously improve our service.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not.

Our policy covers complaints about:

- the standard of service we provide;
- the behaviour of our staff, or
- any action or lack of action by staff affecting an individual or group.

Our complaints policy does not cover:

- appeals relating to decisions on the approval of qualifications;
- complaints against a registered teacher in relation to misconduct;
- matters that have already been fully investigated through this complaints procedure;
- anonymous complaints, or
- complaints about access to information where procedures and remedies are set out in legislation, e.g. Freedom of Information Act, Data Protection Act.

Our standards for handling complaints

- We treat all complaints seriously, whether they are made by letter or by email;
- you will be treated with courtesy and fairness at all times - we would hope, too, that you will be courteous and fair in your dealings with our staff at all times;
- we will treat your complaint in confidence within the organisation;
- we will deal with your complaint promptly - we will acknowledge receipt of a written complaint within 5 working days and we will send you a full reply within 20 working days of receipt;
- if we cannot send a full reply within 20 working days of receipt we will tell you the reason why and let you know when we will be able to reply in full, and
- we will publish information in our annual report on the numbers and categories of complaints we receive, and the percentage of complaints upheld.

Confidentiality

All complaints received will be dealt with confidentially and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018.

The procedure below explains how to raise a complaint about the quality of GTCNI's services.

Complaints regarding Teachers

This procedure is intended for complaints about the service provided by GTCNI.

As noted above, it does not cover appeals relating to decisions on the approval of qualifications, or complaints against a registered teacher in relation to misconduct.

If you want to make a complaint against a registered teacher, please contact GTCNI's Head of Corporate Services, as follows:

Head of Corporate Services, General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland

4th Floor Albany House, 73-75 Great Victoria Street, Belfast, BT2 7AF

Tel: 028 9033 3390

Email: complaintsofficer@gtcni.org.uk

How to Complain

GTCNI welcomes your comments and suggestions, both positive and negative, about the service we provide. If you feel we have failed to do something, done something wrong, acted unfairly or discourteously, or if you wish to offer suggestions for improvement, the following complaints procedure outlines the steps you should take.

We have a 2-stage complaints procedure. At each stage it will help us to resolve your complaint quickly if you can give us as much clear detail as possible, including any documents and correspondence and stating that you are making a complaint in line with our procedure.

Making a Complaint

Please contact us with your concerns as quickly as possible, as this will make it easier for us to find out what went wrong. We can deal with your complaint more effectively if you tell us:

- briefly, what your complaint is about;
- when it happened;
- who you dealt with in the organisation; and
- what you would like us to do to put things right.

Please keep a note of any telephone conversations and keep copies of any emails and letters you send or receive.

In compliance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and in line with our Equality Scheme, we will consider any additional needs of a person, in order to support them when making a complaint.

Complaints Procedure

Stage 1: Informal Initial Complaint

If you are not happy with the service you have received, you should initially contact the person that you first dealt with. They will try to put things right.

We hope that most complaints can be dealt with as quickly, and as close to the root of the problem, as possible. We endeavour to respond to initial complaints within 20 working days and will advise where there may be a potential delay when providing a response.

However if the matter cannot be resolved or you still feel dissatisfied after this approach, you may initiate a formal complaint in writing under Stage 2 of this procedure.

Stage 2: Formal Procedure – Level 1

You should write to our Complaints Officer giving full details of the complaint. We will arrange for your complaint to be investigated and we aim to provide a full written reply within 20 working days of receiving it. If a full reply cannot be given within 20 working days, you will be advised of progress and told when you can expect a full response.

Where appropriate and when necessary, the Complaints Officer may escalate the complaint to the Interim Chief Executive/Registrar. If your complaint is escalated to the Interim Chief Executive/Registrar, you will be notified of this and if a full reply cannot be given within 20 working days, you will be advised of progress and told when you can expect a full response. You can contact the Complaints Officer as follows:

Complaints Officer, General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland,
4th Floor Albany House, 73-75 Great Victoria Street, Belfast, BT2 7AF
Email: complaintsofficer@gtcni.org.uk

Stage 3: Formal Procedure – Level 2

If you are not satisfied with the reply, you should write to the Interim Chief Executive/Registrar giving full details of your complaint and why you remain dissatisfied. The Interim Chief Executive/Registrar will arrange for the matter to be reviewed by a senior manager and for a response to be issued within 20 working days. You can contact the Interim Chief Executive/ Registrar as follows:

Interim Chief Executive/Registrar, General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland
4th Floor Albany House, 73-75 Great Victoria Street, Belfast BT2 7AF
Email: chiefexec@gtcni.org.uk

Extending time limits

We aim to complete all complaints within the timescales above; however, if a complaint is very complex it may occasionally be necessary to extend the time limit. If this is the case, we will keep you, the complainant, informed of progress with the investigation, the reasons for the delay, and the new deadline.

Following any stage of the procedure, a complainant has a maximum of 20 working days from the date of the final response to request that their complaint be progressed to the next stage.

Our Standards

In all cases GTCNI will:

- acknowledge receipt of your formal complaint at Stage 2i and, if appropriate, at Stage 2ii (normally within five working days of receipt);
- carry out a thorough investigation;
- aim to provide a written reply to your complaint with a full explanation of the outcome of our investigations within 20 working days and, where this is not possible, let you know when a reply can be expected;
- apologise if we have made a mistake or if a problem has been caused by us;
- let you know what we have done or will do to put things right; and
- ensure complaints will not be dealt with by an individual who could have been involved in the events leading to the complaint.

If You Remain Dissatisfied

If, having followed the 2 stages of our complaints procedure, you still remain dissatisfied, you can ask to have your complaint reviewed externally by someone who does not work for GTCNI.

You can refer your complaint to the NI Public Services Ombudsman. The Ombudsman can carry out independent investigations into complaints about government departments, agencies and public bodies, including GTCNI.

The Ombudsman

Our Complaints Procedure is not a substitute for your right to complain to the Ombudsman's Office. You should note, however, that the Ombudsman will generally expect you to have used all of the steps of GTCNI's Complaints Procedure before accepting your complaint. You may contact the Ombudsman as follows:

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman,

Progressive House, 33 Wellington Place, Belfast, BT1 6HN

Telephone: 028 9023 3821 Text Phone: 028 90897 789

Freephone: 0800 34 34 24 Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Freepost: Freepost NIPSO

Further information and access to complaints forms is available here:

<https://nipso.org.uk/nipso/>

Remedies

When we get things wrong we will act to:

- accept responsibility;
- explain what went wrong and why, and
- put things right by making any changes required.

The action we take to put matters right (i.e. redress) in response to a complaint, can include any combination of the remedies set out in the list below. The general principle

we follow is that a complainant should, so far as possible, be put in the position he or she would have been in, had things not gone wrong.

The remedy chosen needs to be proportionate and appropriate to the failure in service, and take into account what people are looking for when they complain. An apology is normally appropriate, but other action may also be necessary:

- a sincere and meaningful apology (explaining what happened and or what went wrong) - an apology is not an acceptance of liability under Section 2 of the Compensation Act 2006;
- remedial action, which may include reviewing or changing a decision on the service given to an individual complainant;
- service desired by complainant (immediately, if appropriate);
- putting things right (for example change of procedures to prevent future difficulties of a similar kind, either for the complainant or others);
- training or supervising staff, or
- financial compensation.

Compensation

In the majority of cases, remedies other than financial compensation will satisfy the complainant. Financial compensation is therefore a final option, and will only apply in cases where the loss or suffering is considered to warrant such a payment.

In circumstances where the Ombudsman investigation determines that our action or lack of action has resulted in maladministration, if the complainant has suffered direct or indirect financial loss, compensation may be payable. In determining this we will have regard to the following guidance and legislative procedures: [Public Services Ombudsman Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2016 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#).

Where it is decided following investigation of a complaint, that a complainant has suffered an injustice and or hardship resulting in direct or indirect financial loss, due to maladministration, we will determine whether compensation is an appropriate remedy by

looking at all the evidence, including how much the complainant can demonstrate they have lost, or what extra costs they have incurred as a result of our maladministration. The reason for our decision will be recorded by the decision maker and included in our response.

Comments

Quality of service is an important measure of the effectiveness of departments and public bodies. Therefore learning from complaints is a good way of helping to improve and develop the way that GTCNI work. As well as learning from your complaints we are also interested in other ideas you may have on how we might do things better.

You can make your comments by email to info@gtcni.org.uk or by post to the address given above. We will use your comments to help improve our service and the way we do things. However, the 2-stage procedure outlined above does not apply to comments.

Unreasonable Behaviour

All complaints will be processed in accordance with this policy. However, during this process, staff may have contact with unreasonable complainant behaviour and unreasonably persistent complainants.

The Ombudsman defines unreasonably persistent complainants as:

Those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contact with an authority, hinder the authority's consideration of their or other people's, complaints.

Recording Complaints

We will log all complaints we receive so that we can monitor the types of problems, the best way to sort them out and how long we are taking to deal with them. This also helps us to take a closer look at how we can improve our own service delivery.

We will handle your information in line with data protection legislation.

GTCNI Complaints Procedure Flowchart

