



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

JULY 2025

Document Control Panel

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Complaints about Sport Northern Ireland

What to do if you want to complain about the work of Sport Northern Ireland

- 1.1 Sport Northern Ireland understands the importance of excellence in the delivery of its services. We are committed to creating and developing a positive approach to the services we deliver in which we strive to consistently exceed expectations of our stakeholders. We aim to create an environment within which excellence is seen as essential to the management and delivery of services. We are committed to continual improvement. This includes handling complaints carefully in an open and courteous way by investigating the matters raised thoroughly and replying as quickly as possible.
- 1.2 Sport Northern Ireland has an internal two-stage complaints process. We will do all we can to resolve your complaint at the first stage, but if you are not satisfied with our response or you are unhappy with the way we have handled your complaint, you can ask for your complaint to be reviewed. How to complain and details of our procedure are set out below along with how you can expect us to handle your complaint.
- 1.3 We will treat an individual or organisation making a complaint impartially, in confidence and with respect and courtesy. No individual or organisation will be adversely treated because they have found cause to complain about our service. All personal information must be handled in line with the UK-GDPR requirements.

Informal Complaints

- 2.1 If you are unhappy with our treatment of you then please get in touch, as soon as possible, with the Sport Northern Ireland staff member who has responsibility for the work. They are best placed to sort out most problems. If you are still not satisfied or feel unable to raise the matter with that person, then please raise a formal written complaint, following the procedures outlined below.

Formal Complaints

What do we consider to be a complaint?

- 3.1 Sport Northern Ireland regards a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction made to us about a perceived failure to carry any aspect of our service. We want to know so that we can try to put things right in the most appropriate manner and make longer-term improvements.

Who can complain?

- 3.2 Anyone who comes into contact with Sport Northern Ireland and is unhappy or dissatisfied can complain. For example, you could be a member of the public or an employee of a body associated with Sport Northern Ireland.

Who do I complain to?

- 3.3 There are two ways by which you can complain. You can make a complaint in writing which should be sent to the Chief Operating Officer (using the address below) who will raise the issue directly with the Manager responsible for that service

Chief Operating Officer
Sport NI,
House of Sport
2a Upper Malone Road,
Belfast
BT9 5LA

Or if you prefer you can email your complaint to complaints@sportni.net

3.4 The following is a guide to the detail that should be included in your complaint:

1. You should include information about yourself including name, address, telephone number, email address etc.
2. You should include information about the issue to be raised:
 - Which Sport Northern Ireland service does this complaint relate to? Include the name of the relevant staff member(s) you were dealing with – if appropriate
 - What issue would you like to report? Outline the background to the issue, when it occurred and give a brief description of what you think Sport Northern Ireland failed to do, or did wrongly
 - How has it affected you? Describe how this has affected you or your interests
 - What would you regard as a reasonable remedy to the matter?
 - If there has been a delay in telling/informing us about the issue, please state why.
3. Have you raised this issue previously with Sport Northern Ireland? (If yes, and if possible, please provide a copy of the response you received or alternatively provide some details).

Is there a time limit for complaining?

- 3.5 We will do all we can to look into your complaint. In order to ensure that complaints are dealt with properly, we will not usually accept complaints that are made more than 12 months after the event being complained about or being brought to your attention.

Are there any types of complaint that this procedure cannot consider under this process?

- 3.6 If you wish to comment on the performance or behaviour of an organisation associated or funded by Sport NI, you should raise it with that organisation, using its own complaints procedure.
- 3.7 Complaints that Sport Northern Ireland has failed to meet its obligations to disclose information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and to deal with requests in accordance with statutory procedure are subject to a distinct formal process. If your complaint relates to **Freedom of Information**, please write to:

Sport NI Information Manager,
Sport NI,
House of Sport
2a Upper Malone Road,
Belfast, BT9 5LA

- 3.8 If a complainant is vexatious and/or repetitious, we may bring the communication to a close for a notified period of time. The definition of vexatious is included at Annex A

What happens to my complaint? (Stage One)

- 3.9 Once you have made a complaint to Sport Northern Ireland in writing to the Chief Operating Officer, we will send you an acknowledgement within **three** working days of receipt. That acknowledgement will provide an indication as to who will be responsible for responding to you and when you can expect to receive a reply. If we cannot investigate your complaint, we will write to you explaining why. If possible, we will suggest another organisation that may be able to help you if we cannot.
- 3.10 We expect to respond to the majority of complaints within **15** working days of the complaint arriving with us. The time taken to respond will vary depending on the complexity of the complaint. However, if we are unable to respond within this deadline because, for example, the matters you raise require more detailed investigation, we will let you know.
- 3.11 We will give serious consideration to the issues you raise. Where we identify mistakes in our approach, we will acknowledge those and this may include providing an apology, setting out details of other steps we think are necessary in the circumstances, and explaining what we will do to prevent the problem occurring again.

What happens if I disagree with the outcome, or how my complaint was handled? (Stage Two)

- 3.12 We will make every effort to satisfactorily resolve your complaint in the first instance. However, if you are not satisfied by our response or by the way that your complaint was handled, you should contact the Chief Executive's Office. You will need to outline why you are dissatisfied with the initial response.

Chief Executive Officer
Sport NI,
House of Sport
2a Upper Malone Road,
Belfast
BT9 5LA

richardarchibald@sportni.net

- 3.13 We will acknowledge the complaint within **three** working days of receipt and the Chief Executive will arrange for the case to be reconsidered by a member of staff who was not

previously involved in handling your complaint. This stage will involve a full independent review of the handling of your complaint and all associated papers. The outcome of this review will be communicated to you in writing within **15** working days of the receipt of the complaint, however if for any reason there is a problem with collating the response, we will inform you of the reason for a delayed response and will inform you of the expected date of reply.

What can I do if I am still dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage Two?

- 4.1 If you remain dissatisfied following the outcome of Stage Two, you may contact the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman's Office (NIPSO) as Sport Northern Ireland falls under Schedule 3 to the Public Services Ombudsman Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.
- 4.2 The NIPSO will expect you to exhaust our internal complaints process before they will accept your complaint. In addition your contact with the Ombudsman's Office must be done within six months from the completion of our process, although they may investigate a complaint outside this time limit if there are special circumstances that would make it proper to do so.

You can contact the Ombudsman in any of the following ways:

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
Progressive House
33 Wellington Place,
Belfast
BT1 6NN

Telephone: 02890 233821

Text Phone: 02890 897789

Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

Freepost: Freepost NIPSO

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Further details are available from the NI Public Services Ombudsman's website:

<https://nipso.org.uk>

Equality and Diversity

- 4.3 We want our services to be accessible to all our stakeholders, regardless of age, disability, race or any other factor that may cause a disadvantage. To this end we strive to ensure that our services are accessible to all. This includes:
 - Providing wheelchair access in all our offices
 - Arranging to visit you in your home if you cannot visit our offices

- Arranging to make available interpretation or other communicative services if required

Reporting of Complaints

- 5.1 The receipt of complaints will be reported to the Sport NI Audit & Risk Assurance Committee.
- 5.2 Sport NI will periodically review the Complaints Handling process including the number of complaints received, the number dealt with within the timeframes, the number reported to NIPSO, and any lessons learned. Lessons learned will be shared with all relevant personnel.

ANNEX A

Vexatious Complainants (As defined by the NI Public Services Ombudsman policy on Unacceptable Behaviour)

A complainant may be defined as ‘habitual’ or ‘vexatious’ where current or previous contact with them demonstrates that they:

- i) change the substance of a complaint, continually raise new issues, or seek to prolong contact by continually raising further concerns or questions upon receipt of a response whilst the complaint is being addressed. Care must be taken not to discard new issues that are significantly different from the original complaint as these might need to be addressed as separate complaints.
- ii) are unwilling to accept documented evidence as being factual; deny receipt of an adequate response in spite of correspondence specifically answering their questions; or do not accept that facts can sometimes be difficult to verify when a long period of time has elapsed.
- iii) do not clearly identify the precise issues that they wish to have investigated, despite reasonable efforts of staff and, where appropriate, third party advisors to help them specify their concerns; and/or where the concerns identified are not within the Ombudsman’s remit to investigate.
- iv) focus on a trivial matter to an extent that is out of proportion to its significance, and continue to focus on this point. It is recognised that determining what is a ‘trivial’ matter can be subjective, and careful judgement must be used in applying this criteria.
- v) have, in the course of their complaint, had an excessive number of contacts with the Office placing unreasonable demands on staff. A contact may be in person or by telephone, letter or fax. Discretion must be used in determining the precise number of ‘excessive contacts’ applicable under this section, using judgement based on the specific circumstances of each individual case.
- vi) have harassed, been personally abusive, or verbally aggressive on more than one occasion towards staff dealing with their complaint. Staff must recognise that complainants may sometimes act out of character at times of stress, anxiety, or distress and should make reasonable allowances for this. All incidents of harassment must be recorded.
- vii) are known to have recorded meetings or face-to-face / telephone conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of other parties involved.
- viii) display unreasonable demands or expectations, and fail to accept that these may be unreasonable, i.e. insist on responses to complaints or enquiries being provided more urgently than is either reasonable or normal practice.