

CUSTOMER SERVICE OFFICER HANDBOOK

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Telephone Notes

See the HiPath guidance for instructions on logging on, being available/unavailable and wrap ups

The call:

- Have a greeting prepared for your callers. For example:
“Good morning/afternoon, Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, John speaking. How can I help?”
- If the call relates to an existing case obtain the name of the caller and the reference number and put the call through to the office dealing with the case. This will usually be the case owner or the file holder on VF.
- If the call is a new complaint get details of the complaint, the stage the complaint is at, and the contact details (address and telephone number) of the complainant.
- If the case is premature advise the complainant of the relevant complaints process they need to follow. If appropriate, offer to send them leaflets/complaint forms to assist them.
- If the case appears to be read for PHSO to consider, but lacks an MP referral (for Parliamentary cases) or is a Health case (ones made over the phone are “not properly made”), you can RB the case. Give the complainant the relevant advice on providing their papers, send them a complaint form if appropriate, and explain the RB time limit. If it is a Parliamentary case give the complainant their MP’s contact details.
- If in doubt, ASK! Either put the complainant on hold or take their number and offer to call them back having sought advice from a manager or colleague.

Difficult calls/complaints about us:

- If a complainant becomes abusive, giving them a warning that you will terminate the call if they persist using abusive behaviour/language. If they do persist, politely inform them that you are terminating the call and hang up. If you think they may call back, send an email to the rest of Customer Services so other CSO’s and managers are aware of the complainant.
- If a complainant is unhappy with the advice you are giving them, transfer them to a team leader in the first instance.
- If a complainant is not happy with how we have dealt with an existing case try and get some basic information about what they are unhappy about (such as the

decision, delay, etc) and then transfer it to the Review Team (extension _____). Introduce the call giving the reference number and name if possible. If the Review Team line is engaged, offer to take a message to pass on.

- If a complainant is unhappy with a specific caseworker but not the decision, offer to transfer them to the relevant manager, or the Review Team.
- If a case is at Post Review status on VF, the call should be transferred to (_____. Introduce the call giving the reference number and name if possible. If _____ is not available, explain to the caller that they can put their issues in writing or you will pass on the message that they have called. However, explain that you cannot guarantee that someone will call them back, as the case is closed.
- In cases where we have made a decision to no longer speak to a complainant, a message will pop up on VF when you open their case, directing you to a History Item explaining matters. If the call concerns the existing complaint you should advise the caller that we cannot discuss it further with them, and that you will pass on that they have called but there is nothing more you can do.

Transferring a call:

If you need to transfer a call find out the relevant extension number on the online directory. It is usually a good idea to give the caller the direct number of the person you are transferring to in case you get cut off (unless there is a reason that the caller should not have the direct number). You can transfer the caller using HiPath, or your phone. To transfer a caller using the phone, press the tick button and dial the extension number. You should always introduce yourself and the call before putting the call through.

- *Person answers and is willing to take the call*
If the relevant person answers and accepts the call just hang up and the call will be transferred to them.
- *Person answers but cannot take the call*
If you have spoken to someone at the extension but the relevant person is unavailable (if you are not using a headset) put the phone down after they have hung up. The phone will then ring again with the complainant at the other end. If you are using a headset your line will just ring again once the person you called has hung up.
- *No-one answers or the call goes to voicemail*
If the phone rings but no-one answers press the arrow keys on your phone until you get the option "connect held call", and you will go back to the complainant.

If the call connects to someone's voicemail, and you have not already agreed with the caller that they are happy to leave a message on a voicemail, press the keys * # * # * # (in that order). If you are using the handset the option "connect held call" will show and you should press the tick button to be connected to the complainant again. If you are using a headset your phone will just ring again and you answer it as usual to be connected to the caller again.

In both cases, take a message or give the complainant the direct number of the relevant officer.

Please note that the case owner/file holder should take responsibility for a call about a complaint they are dealing with. If you find an individual does not want to take a call that they should be taking, let _____ know. We are an advice line and not a switchboard/message taking service. Other departments in our office should not be passing calls to us which they should be dealing with.

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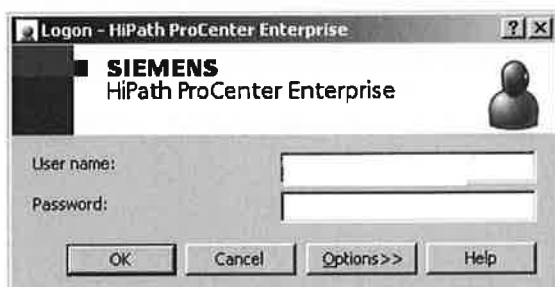
HiPath manual

Logging on, off and availability

1) Log on using the Client Desktop icon on your desktop (or by selecting Start, Programs, HiPath ProCenter and clicking Agent).



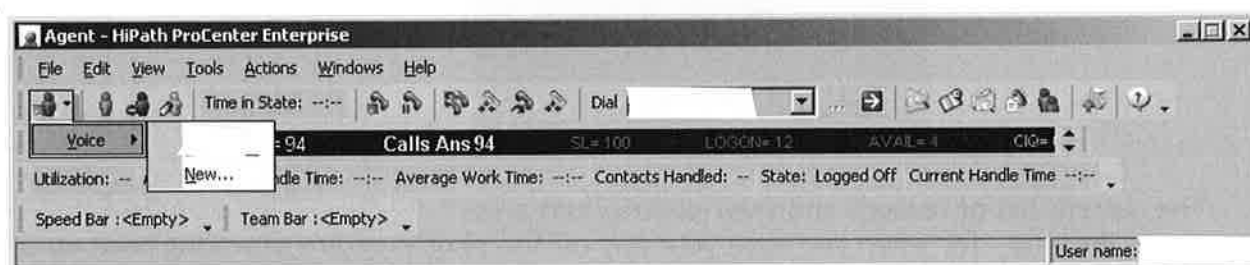
2) Your username is your surname and initial.



3) To log into the advice line, click the arrow to the right of the blue figure.

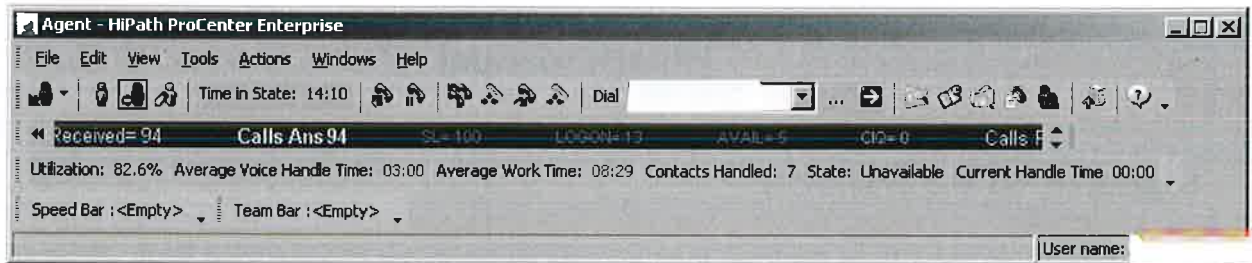


4) The first time you log in you will need to specify which extension you are working on. Hover over the option Voice, and a menu will pop up. Click New.



5) Input your extension number in the white space and press enter. When you log in again you just have to click the blue figure with the green arrow.

6) You are now logged on, but unavailable.



7) To become available to take calls, press the button with the green figure.



8) If you need to leave your desk for a break that is not work related, press the button with the red figure.



9) If you need to leave your desk, or take time off the phone for work reasons, press the button with the yellow figure. You will be presented with a list of options; pick the relevant option for your reason for being unavailable for calls.



Work Reason

Select a reason that best describes why you are in Work state

Name: Copying/Printing

Description: Away from desk to photocopy or print

Select

The current list of reasons and their descriptions are:

- ❖ Back up - for when you have your day off the phones or are providing back up to a team. This will show who is available as extra cover.
- ❖ Case discussion - leaving your desk to consult on a case.
- ❖ Contact creation - when you are busy creating a contact on VF.
- ❖ Copying/Printing - away from desk to photocopy or print.
- ❖ Difficult call - for when you have taken a difficult call and need time to deal with it/prepare for the next call. Also alerts managers that you may need assistance.
- ❖ Meeting
- ❖ Outward call - outward call relating to casework.
- ❖ VF case creation - creating a new case on VF from a phone call.

10) To log off, click the blue figure, which now has a red arrow next to it.



Answering, holding and transferring calls

1) You can answer and transfer calls using the phone handset (see separate guidance) or by using HiPath. To answer a new incoming call on HiPath, click the Answer button.



To end the call, click the Answer button again (when a call is live it becomes the End button).



2) To put a caller on hold, click the Hold button. To get the caller back, click the Hold button again (when a call is live it becomes the Retrieve button).



3) You can transfer calls using the phone handset or by using HiPath. To transfer a call using HiPath, and announce the call to the person you are transferring it to, click the Consult button.



Input the person's extension number and press enter or click the green arrow to dial.



After they pick up and you have announced the call, to transfer it click Transfer.



If you need to get the call back after dialling another extension (for example, if you get through to someone's voicemail, or if the person doesn't want to take the call), click Reconnect. This can also be done using the phone handset (see separate guidance).



Wrapping up a call

1) When you receive a call a box pops up with four tabs. We only use Details and Wrap-up.

Details tells you information about the incoming call - the number called from if available, the option the caller picked from our automated system, and how long they have been holding.

The image shows two side-by-side screenshots of a software window titled "Voice - Contact Details: 09:11:36".

Left Screenshot (Details tab):

- Menu: File, Edit, View, Tools, Actions, Help
- Buttons: Save and Close, 22:01, ?
- Fields: Directory Query, Search In
- Status: This contact was completed at 09:33:47.
- Tabs: Details (selected), Contact Data, Directory, Wrap-up
- Section: View information on the current contact
- Form Fields:
 - Contact Description: Health Ombudsman
 - Source: [Redacted]
 - Destination: [Redacted]
 - From: [Redacted]
 - Origin Queue: T-Hombud, Priority: 80
 - Answering user: [Redacted]
 - Time:
 - Target service level: 00:20 hh:mm:ss
 - Wait time: 00:11 hh:mm:ss
 - Handling time: 22:01 hh:mm:ss
 - Supplemental Information Address: [Redacted]
- Footer: Queue: T-Hombud, Description: Health Ombudsman

Right Screenshot (Wrap-up tab):

- Menu: File, Edit, View, Tools, Actions, Help
- Buttons: Save and Close, 22:01, ?
- Fields: Directory Query, Search In
- Status: This contact was completed at 09:33:47. A Wrap-up reason must be entered.
- Tabs: Details, Contact Data, Directory, Wrap-up (selected)
- Section: Select one or more Wrap-up reasons to include in the Contact Details
- Table:

Name /	Description
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Communications	Call for Comms Division
<input type="checkbox"/> Contact	New Contact created on Visualfiles
<input type="checkbox"/> Customer Service	Transfer to a colleague in CS
<input type="checkbox"/> Cut Off Call	When a call is terminated by the system
<input type="checkbox"/> Equitable Life	Call about Equitable Life - transferred
<input type="checkbox"/> Follow-up Self	Call regarding a case in your name
<input type="checkbox"/> Handled followup	Call for Ops that couldn't be transferred ar
<input type="checkbox"/> HR	Call for HR or L and D
<input type="checkbox"/> New Enquiry	New Enquiry created on Visualfiles
<input type="checkbox"/> Operations	Call for staff in Operations
<input type="checkbox"/> Private Office	Call for Ann's Casework or Governance tea
<input type="checkbox"/> Recent Publicity	Call about recent publicity - directed throu
<input type="checkbox"/> Review Team	Call complaining about our service that is
<input type="checkbox"/> Service Delivery	Call for Purchasing, Facilities, IT etc
- Buttons: Select All, Clear All, Show selected only: ☐
- Footer: Queue: T-Hombud, Description: Health Ombudsman

Wrap-up is a list of wrap up reasons, in which you select the outcome of the call. When the call ends, the box switches to the wrap up tab automatically.

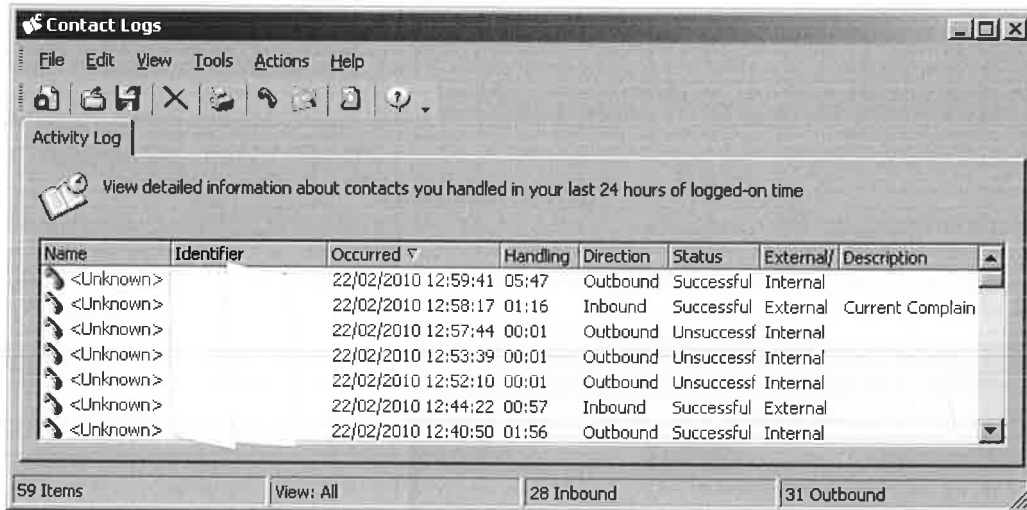
Between the call ending and you completing the wrap up, you will be unavailable in HiPath for the reason "Work - Mandatory" and won't get any incoming calls until you complete your wrap up.

Other functions

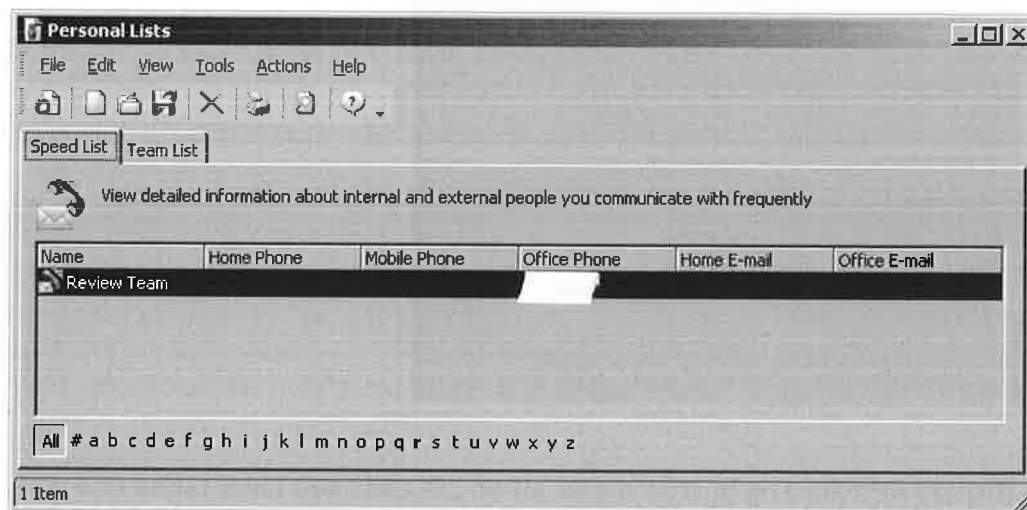
- 1) The Display Contact Details button gives you the details on your last incoming call.

The screenshot shows a software window titled "Voice - Contact Details: 09:11:36". It has a menu bar with "File", "Edit", "View", "Tools", "Actions", and "Help". Below the menu bar is a toolbar with icons for "Save and Close", a clock showing "22:01", and a help icon. There is a "Directory Query:" field and a "Search In" dropdown. A status bar at the top indicates "This contact was completed at 09:33:47". The main area has tabs for "Details", "Contact Data", "Directory", and "Wrap-up". The "Details" tab is active, showing "View information on the current contact". The contact information is organized into sections: "Contact" with fields for "Description:" (Health Ombudsman), "Source:" (redacted), "Destination:" (redacted), and "From:" (redacted); "Origin" with fields for "Queue:" (T-Hombud), "Priority:" (80), and "Answering user:" (redacted); "Time" with fields for "Target service level:" (00:20), "Wait time:" (00:11), and "Handling time:" (22:01), all with "hh:mm:ss" labels; and "Supplemental Information" with an "Address:" field. At the bottom, a status bar shows "Queue: T-Hombud" and "Description: Health Ombudsman".

- 2) The Display Activity Log button shows all of the calls you have taken or made while logged into HiPath in the last 24 hours.



3) The Display Speed List button shows your personal telephone number directory, which you may find helpful if you make calls using HiPath to dial the number.



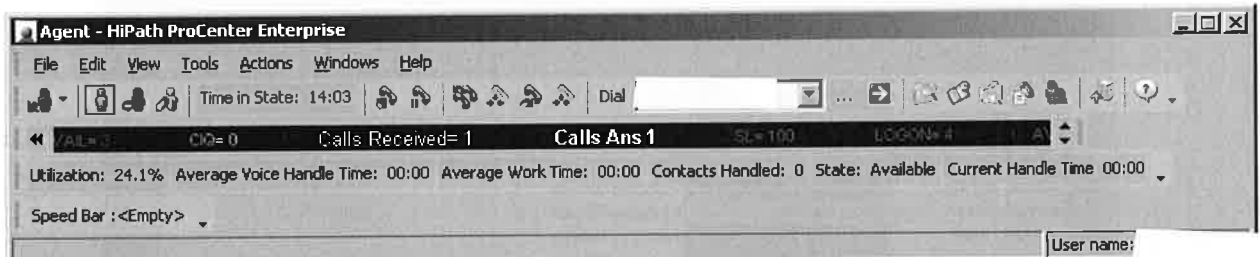
To add a number to the Speed List click New Speed Entry.



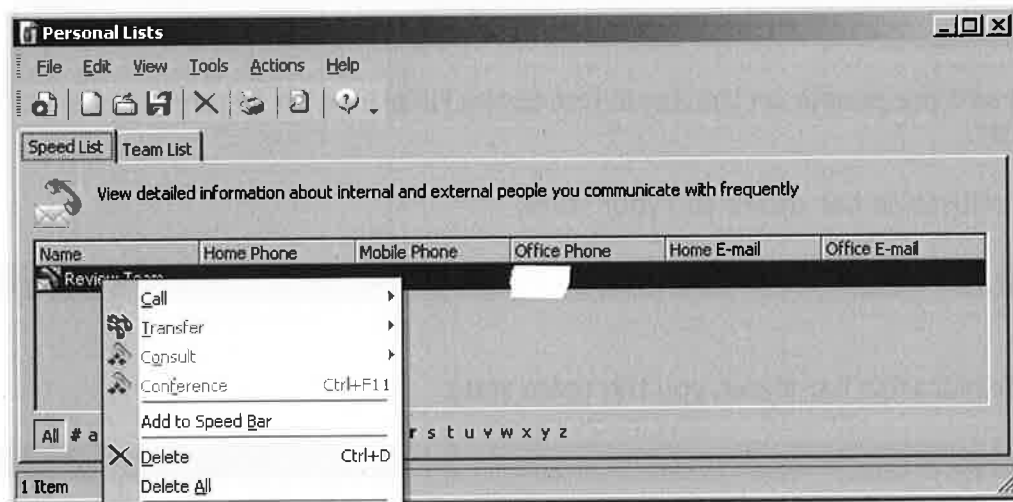
Then add the details.



You can have these numbers available on the HiPath Agent by clicking View, Toolbars, and selecting Speed Bar. This adds the Speed Bar to the bottom of the Agent.



To add a number from your Speed List to the Speed Bar, go to the Speed List, right click on the number and click Add to Speed Bar.

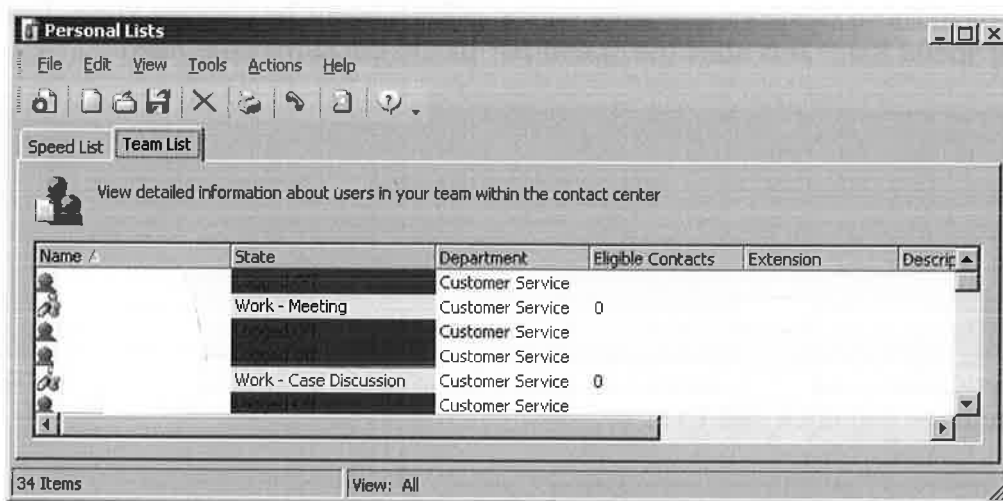


The number will then be at the bottom of your HiPath Agent.



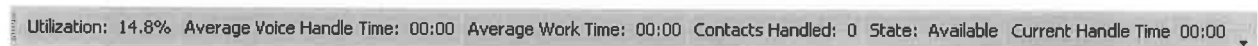
You can dial people on the Speed Bar by clicking their name and pressing the green dial button.

4) The Display Team List button shows you all the other CSO's, whether they are logged into HiPath, available or unavailable.



You can add the people on the Team List to the HiPath Agent in same way as for the Speed List.

5) The Utilisation bar shows you your stats.



6) The Broadcaster bar shows you the team stats.



Customer Service responses

- PHSO have produced a PHSO style guide, which is available on the intranet and covers house style for reports and letters.
- More specifically to customer services, we should adhere to the general guidelines below.
- If you use Tel: or Telephone: for one contact number, make sure you use the same label for the contact numbers of other bodies in your letter/email.
- Do not use the “Using your information/Happy with our service/Feedback” paragraphs if you have already sent the complainant an acknowledgement slip/acknowledgement email (as these have the same information as those paragraphs).
- If you have a line such as “I outline the contact details below” near the bottom of the page, ensure the relevant information is actually below the line on the same page. Otherwise, change the line to something like “I outline the contact details on the following page”.
- Don’t have a postal address split over two pages. Move the whole address to the following page if necessary or pull the bottom margin down if you are short of space by only one or two lines.
- Remember that when naming individuals keep the title and name(s) of the individual on the same line. If possible, without making the line look too short, try to keep the title of organisations on one line too.
- When writing an email response, you need to add a line giving our reference after the “Dear Mr/Mrs X” and before the first paragraph:

Dear Mr Smith

Our reference: EN-12345 (please quote in any future correspondence)

- If writing to an MP or professional body, ensure the complainant’s name and address are presented in bold on the first line between “Dear X” and the first paragraph.
- Don’t forget to ensure you are signing off the letter correctly. “Yours sincerely” should be used when you know the name of the person you are writing to, and “Yours faithfully” when you are address it to Sir/Madam.
- Sometimes text spills over to a new page so “Yours sincerely” and your name and title are the only information on the final page. Bring some text down from the previous page so there is at least some information on the page other than your name.

- Don't forget to check the contact details given at the top of letters. Your direct telephone number and email address are automatically added to letters. It is advisable to change the email address to phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk, in case you are contacted by email but are out of the office - someone else can then deal with the email. You may also wish to change the telephone number to the advice line (0345 015 4033) if you do not wish the complainant to contact you directly.
- Keep an eye out for reference numbers on MP's letters and ensure they are entered into the "Your reference" section of your response letter.
- If you are copying a letter to another individual, please inform the person you are responding to of this in the letter ("I have sent a copy of this letter to..."). If you have said this you do not need to add "cc:" at the end of the letter.
- If it is obvious which sex an individual is please ensure that they have a title. Add "Ms" if the individual is female but their marital status is unclear.
- If using initials for individuals do not use full stops between the initials.
- Once you have sent a response, remember to add a note to VF to say that you have sent the response. The letter/email should also be scanned to VF (if no paper file) or copied to a paper file if there is one.

House style for casework

Why have a house style?

A house style gives guidance to anyone writing documents. Using the house style reduces inconsistencies in the appearance, writing style, spelling, grammar and punctuation of our documents. It also communicates our meaning and message to our readers, whilst maintaining the high quality of our reports.

Our writing style reflects our commitment to our core values. It is an important part of our drive to meet our strategic objectives; these include giving decisions that are 'clear, soundly-based and impartial' and ensuring that 'we are recognised as the authority on good administration and good complaint handling'.

We are committed to writing in plain English using standard British English. Think of your reader when you write, and make sure they will be able to read and understand what you have written. Avoid fussy, over-complicated terms, obscure language and technical jargon. Use short sentences without superfluous words such as *at the end of the day* or *by and large*, and do not repeat yourself. If you must use technical language, explain the terms you are using the first time you write them. Slang, clichés, euphemisms and legalese have no place in our writing, they can obscure the meaning of reports and letters and should be avoided.

When should the house style be used?

This house style is intended for use in our casework and contains the guidance that the Report Editing and Proofreading Team (REPT) will apply when proofreading and copy-editing investigation reports (whether published or not), assessment decision letters and other written casework correspondence (for example, covering letters for draft or final investigation reports).

Casework staff are not expected to know all of the details of the full house style but should follow the main conventions set out in the 'Quick guide' [\[link\]](#) when drafting reports and other documents.

Also use it when you review, rewrite and edit documents, or inconsistencies may creep in, and our readers will lose confidence in the quality of our work.

Who is responsible for the house style?

The house style was drawn up by REPT in conjunction with Media and Communications.

This house style has been developed for use as a printed document, or as an online resource. Some suggestions are repeated in more than one section, so writers looking for, for example, advice on capital letters in titles can search in titles or capital letters for help.

We hope that printing our suggestions in red will make it easy to use on the Intranet or on the page. If you would prefer a copy with our suggestions in a different colour or highlighted, please get in touch with REPT. We will do all we can to help you get the most from this house style guidance.

Questions about the house style should be addressed in the first instance to either _____ (Editing and Proofreading Manager) (x _____) or _____ (Editing and Proofreading Officer) (x _____).

Any suggestions for changes to the house style will be discussed and agreed between REPT and Media and Communications.

Abbreviations, acronyms and contractions

An abbreviation is any shortened word. An acronym, a type of abbreviation, is a pronounceable name that is made from the initials of other words, for example, Cafcass (children and family court advisory and support service).

Organisations that we refer to frequently should be written in full at the first mention, with the abbreviation or acronym in brackets. The abbreviation can then be used throughout the document, for example, She complained to the Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS). After ten days, ICAS responded.

If you refer to an organisation that is not well known or which may only appear in a particular report, such as the Middle Eastern Christian Minority Advice Centre, either write it in full throughout the report or refer to such an organisation as the Centre if this adds clarity.

When using medical terms, consider the impact of this piece: She was admitted to A&E following pain with her IUCD after the LLETZ. The SHO sent her to the MAU where she was diagnosed with a UTI, an ISS of 8 following an MCU and possible DLE. She was then transferred to ICU.

You do not always need to use the when writing about organisations. For example, the General Medical Council is referred to as the GMC, but the Department for Work and Pensions is DWP. Consider HMRC but the RSPCA, the BBC but ITV. Check the body's website or talk to REPT for guidance.

We use familiar abbreviations in health reports, for example, A&E, without giving the full term. Abbreviations that are often used can have the full term written in brackets, for example Mrs Shah had a CT scan (computerised tomography scan - a form of X-ray examination). The CT scan revealed a fracture.

Abbreviations and acronyms in upper case do not have full stops (for example DWP not D.W.P.). Only use abbreviations and acronyms that are already in the public domain, for example A&E, BBC, MRSA, DVT. If you wish to introduce an abbreviation, words are preferable, for example, the preferred abbreviation for the UK Border Agency is the Agency, as opposed to UKBA. When using abbreviations, always give the name in full in the first instance, and provide the abbreviation to be used in brackets: for example, the Child Support Agency (the Agency).

When writing about indefinite leave to remain, do not abbreviate and remember that this term is always in lower case, that is, no capitals.

Contractions are shortened words that keep their final letter, for example Dr, St; do not put a full stop after the contractions Dr, St Hospital.

Avoid can't, won't, there's, you're and so on.

Do not use the abbreviation PHSO in letters or reports. Use the Office, the Ombudsman's Office, we and so forth.

Americanisms and accents on words

Do not use American spelling, such as realize or color, or Americanisms, for example, normalcy, meet with, gotten or airplane.

If you use non-English words, make sure they are spelt correctly with the appropriate accents, for example: bébé, actualité, planète, crwâd, rwan, nesáu.

Use anglicised spellings for foreign places mentioned in reports, for example Munich rather than München.

An or a?

Use an when the word you are writing begins with a vowel sound. So an NHS complaint handler. N here is not a vowel, but it begins with a vowel sound. If you wrote the word for N, you would write en. S is similar, so an SOS.

Use a when the word you are writing begins with a vowel but makes a consonant sound, for example ewe, the word for a female sheep, begins with e, but as it begins with a y sound, it is a ewe. Note that the letter H is written and pronounced aitch. As aitch does not begin with h, ensure you write, for example, an HR department, an HMRC official.

Note that we write an MP but a Member of Parliament.

Benefits and payments

We do not use capitals for benefits, jobseekers allowance, child tax credit, and always write them in full, even if departments use upper case or abbreviate. Note that National Insurance is always written with capitals.

Bodies in jurisdiction

A body in jurisdiction is an organisation that the Ombudsman can investigate. There is a list of bodies in jurisdiction, along with abbreviations you can use when writing about them, annexed to this document. For further information, please contact REPT.

Capitals or lower case

Use initial capital letters for proper nouns (for example Jones, Suffolk, Jobcentre Plus).

When discussing Acts of Parliament, Schedules begin with a capital, sections and paragraphs do not. For example, under paragraph 12 of Schedule 1 or section 3(2) of the 1967 Act.

Write the generic names of drugs in lower case (for example, paracetamol); while trade names for drugs take an upper case initial (for example, Panadol). Always refer to the most up-to-date edition of the *British National Formulary* if you are at all unsure (the web is not reliable here).

When referring to a political office holder, use capital initials when you first mention them, for example, the Secretary of State for Health, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Minister of State; thereafter, use the shortened form with a capital initial: for example, the Member, the Minister, the Chancellor.

If you refer to a particular job title in a report, for example the complaints manager, the consultant, the doctor, the nurse, the chief executive, the police officer etc, only use capitals if the person is named.

The Ombudsman always has a capital! When referring to the Ombudsman for the first time in a report, use the Parliamentary Ombudsman or the Health Service Ombudsman. After this, use the Ombudsman. You do not need to put (the Ombudsman) in brackets after the first full mention.

Do not use the abbreviation PHSO in reports or letters.

Where more than one ombudsman is involved in a case, refer to each in full, for example the Local Government Ombudsman, where this helps clarity.

Collective nouns

A collective noun is a singular word used for a group of individuals, for example, the police, the jury.

Make sure you are consistent when you refer to a body such as a trust or an agency. If you begin a report with The Agency says that it wrote letters, do not then write They say that no one answered their letters.

Courts and legal terms

Magistrates' courts, coroners, judges or the police in general should all be in lower case, for example, the judge said, He telephoned the local magistrates' court. If you are referring to a particular court, judge or police officer, they should be capitalised, for example, She went to Maidstone Magistrates' Court; Judge Khan commented.

Write the High Court and the Court of Appeal like this.

Court cases

Court cases are written thus: *Smith v Cooper* [2010] EWCA Civ 72. Note that the date is always in square brackets and the reference is always abbreviated.

Dates and times

Use this format: 9 June 2007 to write dates.

Give times using the 12-hour clock followed by am or pm without a space. For example, 8pm, 7.45am. The 24-hour clock format can remain if it appears in a quotation from an external source.

If you write an hour without using minutes, you do not need to use zeroes, 8pm, 10pm, 3am.

Between is always followed by and. For example, between 2006 and 2009 (not between 2006-09). You could also write in 2006-09. Likewise, from is always followed by to for example, from 1988 to 2003, or write in 1988-2003. Write tax years as 2009-10.

The first time you mention a date, write it in full, 14 June 2009. Subsequently, you do not need to mention the year unless it changes. For example, In August 2007 Mrs D'Souza visited Wandsworth Jobcentre Plus. She wrote to them on 18 September and again on 14 November. Jobcentre Plus replied on 10 January 2008. Do not break a date over a line.

When you write dates, the entire date should appear on one line, so not 9 November 2006. Press CTRL + SHIFT + SPACEBAR after each part of the date: 9 November 2006.

Fewer and less

Fewer refers to number, and less refers to volume: for example, fewer applications inevitably led to less throughput time. Do not use less for an amount of people.

Footnotes

Footnotes can be a useful tool for presenting information such as acts of parliament without interrupting the flow of a report. However, they may make a report look cluttered or over-complicated, so consider other means of giving information. Note that language use commentators and most modern style guides advise not using footnotes at all.

If you use footnotes, set the line spacing of the footnotes at exactly 12pt. To do this, highlight a footnote, then click on Format. From this drop-down box, click on Paragraph. Click in the line spacing box, then click on Exactly. If the At box is not 12, use the up and down arrows to adjust it to 12. Font size for footnotes is 10.

When using footnotes, place the superscript footnote after the word you are referring to and any punctuation following the word. If the footnote refers to the entire sentence, place the footnote after the full stop.¹

End every footnote, no matter how short, with a full stop.

Using the track changes tool can change how footnotes in a report are numbered or their format, even if the footnotes are not changed. When you send REPT a report to be prepared as a final, tell them track changes have been used and they will check the footnotes.

Foreign placenames

Use anglicised spellings for foreign places, for example Munich rather than München.

For example

If you use a sentence containing for example, you do then not need to use et cetera, so do not write: There were many fish for sale, for example, skate, cod, haddock, halibut et cetera. write There were many fish for sale, for example, skate, cod, haddock and halibut. Of course, you should not be writing et cetera.

Formatting

Our documents are left justified, that is, Word will not break a word over two lines using a hyphen. However, if you use hyphenated words, you may need to use a hard hyphen to ensure there is no hyphen at the end of a line. So, in this example, well-known, is wrong. Place the cursor after well and press CTRL + SHIFT + HYPHEN: well-known. Note that the hard hyphen may look wrong on the screen, but will print correctly.

In addition, names and dates should not break over lines as in the example here, Mrs Cameron. To prevent this, press CTRL + SHIFT + SPACEBAR after Mrs thus Mrs Cameron. Note that if you are referring to a couple, you can have Mr and Mrs Cameron breaking over a line, provided you ensure and is the last word on the upper line.

When you write dates, the entire date should appear on one line, so not 9 November 2006. Press CTRL + SHIFT + SPACEBAR after each part of the date: 9 November 2006.

Use **bold** text sparingly in reports, reserving it for **uphold** and **do not uphold**. See also the Headings section.

When you write a report or a summary, set the margins as:

Top	3.5
Bottom	2.5
Left	2.7
Right	2

¹ Like this.

To set margins, from the first page of the report, click file. From the drop-down box, select Page Setup. Select the Margins tab, then use the up and down arrows to set the margins.

Font type for letters, reports and summaries is Trebuchet, size 12, and line spacing is exactly 14pt. Note that letters and reports at the Office usually default to this.

If you need to check or change the font size, click on format, then font. Set the font to Trebuchet, the font style to Regular and the size to 12. Set spacing by clicking Format, then Paragraph then use the line spacing box to set spacing.

Note that if you use footnotes, set the line spacing at exactly 12pt. To do this, highlight a footnote, then click on F. From this drop-down box, click on Paragraph. Click in the line spacing box, then click on exactly. If the At box is not 12, use the up and down arrows to adjust it to 12. Footnote font size is 10.

When writing letters, set the margins as

Top	4.7
Bottom	3.5
Left	2.2
Right	1.5

The font size and type and the line spacing are the same as in reports. Use A4 page size for formatting.

Government and politics

We use Government to refer to anything relating to activities in the Houses of Parliament, for example, The Government brought in new legislation. Activities of government department are in lower case, so We spoke to a government official.

Only use The Right Honourable or The Rt Hon in an address, never in the body of a letter or report. Refer to any MP in the body of a report as the Member, unless more than one MP is mentioned. If more than one MP is mentioned, they should be referred to as, for example, Nick Harvey MP. In a letter you can refer to an MP by name: Mr Simpson MP and should not use the Member.

When referring to a political office holder, use capital initials for the main words, for example, the Secretary of State for Health, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Minister of State; thereafter, use the shortened form with a capital initial: for example, the Member, the Minister, the Chancellor.

Note that we use an MP but a Member of Parliament.

When writing about indefinite leave to remain, do not abbreviate and remember that this term is always in lower case, that is, no capitals.

Headings

Section headings are in bold, with only the first letter in capitals, for example:

The decision

Headings do not have full stops. They are the same font size as the text of a report, that is, 12 with spacing set to exactly 14.

Honours, decorations

Only mention honours and decorations (CBE, OBE and so forth) in an address, for example, in the first line of an address write: Ms Jane Smith CBE, but in the letter write Dear Ms Smith. Talk to REPT about how honours and salutations should be written if you are in any doubt.

Hyphens

Use hyphens in the following instances:

for written-out numbers: twenty-five, note one- to two-hourly
a well-known fact (but note: it is well known);

Do not hyphenate no one.

Use to when referring to page or paragraph numbers, for example, pages 36 to 41.

We do not hyphenate inpatient, outpatient, decision maker, preoperative, postoperative, life threatening, evidence based, on call, ongoing, email.

We do hyphenate up-to-date, day-to-day. However, consider I made changes from day to day.

You can use hyphens to aid clarity, compare thirty-odd people with thirty odd people. Also the chief executive resigned or the chief executive re-signed.

Note mid-November, but midweek.

If in doubt, check with REPT or the latest Oxford English Dictionary.

Initials

Initials are not followed by full stops, for example, Mr D Cameron. There should be a space between each letter of a name, for example, Mr W J Hague. An exception to this rule is an address with a Post Office box number, for example, Mr N Clegg, PO Box 69, Harrow, HA1 1ZX.

Italics

Use italics in quotation marks when quoting speech and text. The quotation marks themselves should be non-italic. We use italics for all titles of publications, including the *Principles* trilogy. We use italics when we mention each individual Principle, except when they are shown as a bulleted list, for example in the paragraph below the *Ombudsman's Principles* heading.

Ex gratia, pro bono and post mortem do not use italics.

Jargon

Please avoid using jargon at all costs!

Look at these examples:

This paper proposes a method using the Delphi process as a mechanism to help create multiple stakeholder buy-in to a single brand vision and consequently a strong cohesive brand.

The process for agreeing an implementation plan can help to deliver ownership and buy-in, not only to specific tasks but also to the overall conclusions of the project. Since players in the financial markets respond primarily to commercial opportunities, one key area of focus is to explore how new financial instruments and new ways of structuring financial products can change the risk-reward profile of sustainable activities.

Under sections 3(4) to (7) of the *Health Service Commissioners Act 1993* the Ombudsman can only question the merits of a decision taken by a health provider in the exercise of a discretion vested in that provider where there is evidence of maladministration.

Data governance teams rely on existing measurements as the metrics used to populate a data quality scorecard.

Attend this session to learn how to obtain and use numbers to drive organisational improvement, and why your measurement program must include leading indicators and operational metrics in addition to traditional lagging indicators and financial metrics.

If you write anything like these examples, consider how your readers might feel when they receive your report.

Lists - bulleted and punctuation

Lists are bulleted rather than numbered, and must be punctuated properly. Make sure your bullets are in line with the tab space of the paragraphs.

Three examples of list styles are shown below. Choose your style according to the length of your bullet points: longer bullet points usually mean more punctuation!

The first example uses a colon before the list, and punctuates at the penultimate and final bullet points only. For example:

6. The same six key Principles apply to each of the three documents. These six Principles are:

- Getting it right
- Being customer focused
- Being open and accountable
- Acting fairly and proportionately
- Putting things right, and
- Seeking continuous improvement.

The second example uses a colon before the list, lower case letters at the beginning of each bullet with a single line space between each bullet, and punctuates at the end of each bullet with a semicolon, full stop at the end. For example:

3. Here are some things to remember when you present your findings:

- as far as you can, avoid a lengthy repetition of the facts;
- in all cases we should make the findings of maladministration first, then deal with the overall injustice and then move on to remedy;
- make sure you are clear about whether injustice was or was not a consequence of the maladministration or service failure; and
- to uphold a complaint in full or part we must find maladministration and that injustice has flowed from it. Maladministration on its own is not enough.

The third style uses a colon before the list, full stops at the end of each bullet with a single line space between each bullet, and initial upper case letters at the beginning of each bullet. For example:

8. Examples of specific standards and where they might be positioned with the range of those standards are:

- There may be some flexibility between these categories. For example, a Trust's policy might be more appropriately considered as '*established good practice*' but this will depend on the subject matter and content of the policy and the circumstances of the case.
- There is no requirement to present the specific standards under the sub-headings set out above but it may aid clarity in some cases to do so.

Do not have a single bullet at the top of a page; move the last couple of bullets to the following page.

If you have a second level of bullet points, use circles for the sub-bullets, thus:

- There is no requirement to present the specific standards under the sub-headings set out above but it may aid clarity in these cases:
 - The DH has published guidance for trusts on how to handle service reconfigurations. The guidance outlines that all service redesign must demonstrate support from GP commissioners.

Punctuation of sub-bullets should follow the format of other bullets.

Numbers, weights, measures, units and symbols

Write out numbers from one to ten, but use numerals for 11 and over except where there is a mixture, for example, in seven to fourteen days. In cases such as this you can use either words or figures, as long as you use the same for each number.

When using an approximation, use words, for example, twenty years or so.

Money should be written without a decimal point, unless pence are included, for example, £12 not £12.00, but £12.37. If the amount is below £1, write it like this: £0.37. There is always a comma in amounts over £1,000.

When writing about money in millions, write, for example, £1.8 million throughout.

Give times using the 12-hour clock followed by am or pm without a space. For example, 8pm, 7.45am. The 24-hour clock format can remain if it appears in a quotation from an external source.

If you write an hour without using minutes, you do not need to use zeroes, 8pm, 10pm, 3am.

When giving percentages, we always use the words per cent and there is always one space between the numeral and the words, for example, three per cent, 20 per cent.

Write all units of measurement in numbers rather than in words. Use metric measurements (with imperial equivalent in round brackets, if necessary). When giving measurements of length, there is no space between the numeral and the unit of measurement: 20cm, 5km, but 6 miles. Also, we should refer to tonnes, not tons.

When giving temperatures, there is no space between the numeral and the degree symbol: 14°C. Do not use Fahrenheit as a measure of temperature. You can find the ° symbol in the symbol menu that comes up when you select insert then symbol.

Fewer refers to number, and less refers to volume: for example, fewer applications inevitably led to less throughput time. Do not use less for an amount of people.

Ombudsman's Office style features

When referring to paragraphs in a report, do not tell the reader to see the paragraphs above or below, write (paragraphs 34 to 48). Do not use dashes. For consecutive paragraphs, write (paragraphs 3 and 4).

You can use one or two spaces after a full stop, but make sure you are consistent.

Do not use the abbreviation PHSO in letters or reports. Use the Office, the Ombudsman's Office, we and so on.

Staff who, not staff that.

If you are presenting a series of points in a paragraph, use either first... secondly... thirdly...or firstly... second...third... and so on.

Use complaint about not complaint against.

Supplementary information appears in an Annex, not an appendix.

Passive voice

The Ombudsman's Office house style asks for clear sentences written with an active voice. This means that you should avoid writing a sentence such as:

The following day a permanent pacemaker was fitted, but at 5.30pm an emergency procedure was carried out to drain the blood from the outer lining of Mr s heart.

Instead, write:

The following day, specialist technicians fitted a permanent pacemaker but at 5.30pm a cardiologist performed an emergency procedure to drain the blood from the outer lining of Mr 's heart.

The passive voice may be useful when you want to indicate that the person or organisation that carried out an action is irrelevant, such as The syringe was designed for diabetics. In a sentence such as 'It is widely believed that it always rains in London.' the passive voice shows that it is not possible to know who believes this fact.

Using the passive voice can make text seem impersonal, or can give the impression that people or bodies are evading responsibility for an action or event. For example: Opinions were sought on the rebuild; write instead: The Trust sought opinions on the rebuild.

In this example from John Seely's *Oxford A - Z of Grammar and Punctuation* 2009, the use of the passive voice obscures the meaning of the sentence: '*It is considered that in the last resort it is to civil remedies that she should have recourse.*' Seely rewrites this as '*We believe that in the last resort she will have to sue her attacker*'.

People and titles

When referring to a political office holder, use capital initials the first time you write their title in your document, for example, the Secretary of State for Health, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Minister of State; thereafter, use the shortened form with a capital initial: for example, the Member, the Minister, the Chancellor. Note that these titles can flow from one line to the next.

If you refer to a particular job title, for example the complaints manager, the consultant, the doctor, the nurse, the police officer etc, only use capitals for job titles if the person is named.

Note that when you write to a woman, find out how she titles herself and use that format, that is, Mrs, Miss or Ms. Do not simply use Ms for female complainants.

Note that we write an MP but a Member of Parliament.

Punctuation

Use an apostrophe to indicate ownership, the cat's pyjamas, or to show where a letter is missing, can't, they're, it's. Although of course you should not use can't, they're and so on.

It's means it is or it has; for example: It's a jolly holiday with Mary. Its means belonging to it, for example, Bondi Beach is known for its lifeguards.

To show ownership by more than one owner, put an apostrophe at the end of the plural word: the babies' toys, the children's game, the stakeholders' interest.

Where a word ends in s, consider how it will sound in a sentence when you place the apostrophe. For example, Jobcentre Plus's head office, Mr Moses' complaint, Mr Hicks's query, the business's office, the businesses' trade association.

Language commentators suggest that 's should be used *'on the grounds of euphony'*, that is, if it sounds harmonious. Both Fowler (page 23) and the *Cambridge Handbook for Editors, Authors and Publishers* offer the following guidance: *'In English names, 's should be used in all monosyllables and disyllables, in longer words accented on the penultimate syllable and in other longer words where it sounds right'*. The *Cambridge Handbook* goes on to recommend: *'the s is usually omitted when the last syllable is pronounced iz: Bridges' Moses', but James's, Thomas's'*.

Use a comma before and in lists where it would help to make the sense clear: Mr and Mrs Jones, Mr and Mrs Jacobs, Miss Pinter, and Mr Johnson were invited.

Use a comma to mark off phrases such as however, for example, therefore, of course, in fact, indeed, that is, and nevertheless. Only use a comma before and in a long list, as in the previous sentence. Do not use a comma following dates and times.

Use a colon before long or indented quotations.

Use a semicolon when you are linking two parts of a sentence that are of equal importance and which could work as separate sentences, for example, His injuries were serious; he had hit his head.

A semicolon also marks multiple-worded entries in a list, for example: Visiting birds included: the great crested grebe; the long legged shrike; the lesser spotted fly catcher; the thick-kneed bustard; the bar tailed godwit; and the short-toed tree creeper.

To mark a parenthesis (a word or phrase inserted as an explanation or afterthought) in a sentence, use round brackets. For example: Mr Jones (Ms Smith's brother) visited her.

When a parenthesis forms part of a sentence, the full stop must be placed after the second bracket. For example: Mr Jones said Ms Smith had seemed ill when he first visited her (in November). Note: (When the whole sentence is a parenthesis, the full stop is to be placed inside the second bracket.)

Note that round brackets are sometimes referred to as parentheses.

You can use en dashes (short dashes) to mark an emphatic parenthesis, to introduce an explanation, or to summarise. Check that these print as short dashes - not as hyphens -.

If in doubt, check with REPT or the latest Oxford English Dictionary.

Quotations

All quotations must be in italic, and longer quotations, or those which are indented, must follow a colon:. Use a single quote mark ' at the start of the quotation. If you put a quotation within a quotation, use double quotes ". If a quotation is part of a sentence, put the full stop outside the quote marks.

For example:

Mrs Smith accepted our findings but said: 'I am very unhappy'.

In his report, the nurse said: 'The document stated "use forceps" so I did'.

Use stand alone quotations (that is, show them separately from the text) for quotations over three lines and indent the quotation to the same left margin as the tab setting for your numbered paragraphs. The final full stop in a stand alone quotation should be inside the quote mark. For example:

The guidance states that:

'Once a file comes to us, it will contain documents either to check or to post. If to post, we put the file in the Post tray and if to check, we put it in the to do tray with a number and also mark it on the red clip-board. Posting is entered on the black clip-board.'

Please ensure you follow this guidance in all situations.

Use ellipsis (three dots) to show that something has been omitted from part of a quotation that is being cited; but you do not need to begin or end quotations with ellipses (it is obvious when one is quoting from a larger text that the quotation is an excerpt).

Put any explanatory text that needs to be added to a quotation in square brackets without italics. For example:

'He [the complainant's boss] then took back the keys to the Vauxhall [the complainant's company car].'

Race and sex

Only mention a person's race when it is relevant to the complaint or story. Use black, not Black, and Asian not asian.

When you write to a woman, find out how she titles herself and use that format, that is, Mrs, Miss or Ms. Do not simply use Ms for a female complainant, unless this is the title she uses.

References

We use the Harvard style when we quote from publications.

Please use the following forms:

Books:

These should always be italicised with no quote marks, the same as all publications. The format is author, initials., year. *title of book*. Edition (Note: only mention the edition if it is not the first.). Place of publication: Publisher.

Blyton, E., 1954. Noddy in Toytown. 3rd ed. London: Pearson.

If a book has more than one author, refer to it thus:

Blyton, E. and Dickens, C., 1973. Crate Expectations. 4th ed. Manchester: Penguin.

If a book has more than four authors, use the first author followed by et al:

Dickens, C. et al., 1886. A Study of the River Thames. London: Robinson.

For edited books, give the editor's surname and initials then ed.

Jekyll, J. ed., 1882. Being Whole Again. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.

Jekyll, J. and Hyde, C. eds., 1880. Personality Transformations. Edinburgh: Random House.

And if referring to specific pages in books, please do the following:

Blyton, E., 1954. *Noddy in Toytown*. London: Pearson, pp. 4-17.

Jekyll, J. and Hyde, C. eds., 1880. *Personality Transformations*. Edinburgh: Random House, p148. ..

Articles:

When quoting from an article in a journal, use the format: Author surname, initials., Year. Title of article. *Full Title of Journal*, volume number (issue/part number). Page numbers. Thus:

Other, M., 1993. Discipline in Young Children. *Journal of Psychiatry*, 24 (6), p14-18.

When quoting from a journal available on the internet, give the usual information along with the correct URL of the piece and the date on which you accessed the piece, so: Author, initial., year. Title of article, *Full title of journal*, [online]. Available at: web address [Accessed date]. So:

Dillow, C., 2010. Fermilab is Building a 'Holometer' to Determine Once and For All Whether Reality Is Just an Illusion, *Popular Science and Technology*, [online]. Available at: <http://www.popsci.com/science/article/2010-10/fermilab-building-holometer-determine-if-universe-just-hologram> [Accessed 28 October 2010].

If you quote from a newspaper article, the reference format is: author, initials., year. Title of article or headline. *Newspaper title in full*, day month page number.

Garner, R., 2010. Vince Cable cancels talk in face of student protests. *The Independent*, 28 October p.10.

For an online newspaper, use

Adams, G., 2010. Argentina mourns the president who led his nation back from brink. *The Independent* [online] 28 October. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/argentina-mourns-the-president-who-led-his-nation-back-from-brink-2118454.html> [accessed at 29 October 2010].

Religion

All religions should be capitalised, Christianity, Islam and so on.

Reported speech

Remember that question marks are not needed when putting a query into reported (or indirect) speech. For example, The nurse asked if she needed anything.

In reported speech, you can take out *that* in a sentence: She said that she felt better. or She said she felt better.

Small things you may not have thought of

Appeal against a decision, not appeal a decision

benefit, benefited, benefiting

buy or bought

bring or brought

Cannot instead of can not. However, can not is used in a sentence such as Sheila can not only sing, she also dances brilliantly. where can not is part of a set phrase.

to correspond with (a person), to (a thing)

Different from; opposite to

to differ with (a person), from (in comparisons) *not* to differ to/than

The past tense of lead is led. Unfortunately the toxic metallic element lead is pronounced the same as the past tense of lead.

level, levelled

parallel, paralleled

to part from (a person), with (a thing)

prefer, preferred, preferable

programme *not* program (but use program for IT references)

refer, referred, referral

travel, traveller, travelled

If you use a sentence containing for example, you do then not need to use et cetera, so do not write: There were many fish for sale, for example, skate, cod, haddock, halibut etc., write There were many fish for sale, for example, skate, cod, haddock and halibut.

Use the word that to aid clarity. For example, write The doctor said that that patient had left. when you need to single out which patient had left.

That or which? Use that when you want to indicate one of a number of possibilities, The car that is parked outside is mine. so there are several cars and the one parked outside is mine.

Which gives more information, so My car, which is green, is parked outside. Use which, not that, in sentences such as: The new edition of the book, which has taken ten years to write, will be published next week.

If you would like information about the use of that and which in defining and non-defining clauses, please contact REPT.

Spellings

Use ise and not ize spellings: organise, visualise, civilisation and so on.

Use ageing not aging; jail not gaol; adviser not advisor; email not e-mail; focused not focussed; biased not biassed; judgment not judgement; X-ray instead of x-ray, and learnt not learned.

Titles

Occasionally, we send letters to people with titles, or mention them in our letters and reports (Peers, members of the Royal Family, members of the armed forces etc). If you are unsure of how to address or refer to any such people, REPT have a book, *Debrett's Correct Form*, which holds the answers. Contact us and we will answer any queries.

Note that a letter to Sir Digby Smith will begin: Dear Sir Digby, not Dear Sir Smith.

Book titles should always be italicised with no quote marks, the same as other publications.

Words

Common confusions

to affect (influence/adopt); *to effect* (accomplish/bring about)

appraise (work out the value of something); *advise* (inform)

assure (give confidence to something); *ensure* (make happen); *insure* (arrange insurance for someone or something)

born (given birth to); *borne* (supported/sustained/carried/taken/assumed/conveyed)

breach (gap/break/separation/severance/violation of an obligation); *breech* (the lower part/the bottom of something)

censor (prevent publication); *censure* (strongly criticise)

complement (one of two parts of a whole/a person or thing that completes something); *compliment* (a gesture of respect or admiration)

comprehensive (exhaustive); *comprehensible* (intelligible)

continual (recurring with breaks); *continuous* (recurring without any break)

defective (damaged); *deficient* (short of)

definite (precise); *definitive* (conclusive)

deprecate (argue against); *depreciate* (fall in value)

derisive (showing contempt); *derisory* (deserving contempt)

discreet (tactful/careful to avoid scandal or embarrassment); *discrete* (distinct or separate in form or part)

disinterested (impartial); *uninterested* (bored)

dissatisfied (not content or happy with something) *unsatisfied* (not satisfied, a feeling of needing more)

elemental (basic); *elementary* (simple)

eligible (suitable); *illegible* (unclear)

exhaustive (comprehensive); *exhausted* (tired)

forbear (refrain from/cease/tolerate); *forebear* (forefather/ancestor)

forceful (energetic); *forcible* (done with force)

forego (to go before/precede in time or place); *forgo* (to do without/give up)

formally (conventionally/methodically/stiffly); *formerly* (earlier/previously)

imply (suggest); *infer* (deduce)

intense (extreme); *intensive* (concentrated)

loath/loth (unwilling); *loathe* (hate/detest)

militate (influence); *mitigate* (soften)

ordinance (decree); *ordnance* (arrangement, often military)

partly (in part); *partially* (incompletely)

practical (opposite of theoretical); *practicable* (capable of being done)

principal (chief/first in order of importance); *principle* (standard or rule of conduct/morality/fundamental or general truth)

Also be wary of confusing parts of speech, such as nouns with verbs. Notably: *advice* noun and *advise* verb (*advised*, *advising*); *practice* noun and *practise* verb (*practised*, *practising*); *licence* noun and *license* verb (*licensed*, *licensing*); and *dependant* noun and *dependent* adjective (for example: *the sibling is a dependant*, *he is a dependent sibling*).

Annex A: Common mistakes

Yes	No
about twenty	around 20

to acquiesce in	acquiesce to
adviser	advisor
affinity between/with	affinity for
ageing	aging
to arise	arise out of
biased	biased
bored with or by	bored of
centre on/in	centre around
to comprise someone/something	to comprise of
consider someone/something	to consider as
to consult someone/something	to consult with
credit someone with	credit someone for
to die of	to die from
different from	different to
dissociate	disassociate
email	e-mail
earned	earnt
focused	focussed
independent of	independent from
indifferent to	indifferent from
jail	gaol
judgment	judgement
learnt	learned
to lend	to loan
to meet someone/something	to meet (up) with
on to	onto
oblivious of	oblivious from/to
prefer to	prefer than
preventive	preventative
protest at/against	protest about
to recur	reoccur
spelt	spelled
transport	transportation
to try to	to try and
X-ray	x-ray

Annex B: Abbreviations and acronyms for bodies in jurisdiction

Body in jurisdiction	Accepted abbreviation and/or acronym
Arts Council of England (Arts Council England)	Arts Council
Board of Trade	The Board
Cabinet Office (parts of)	Cabinet Office
Care Quality Commission	CQC or the Commission
Central Office of Information	COI
Charity Commission	The Commission
Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission	The Commission
Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service	CAFCASS
Commission for Equality and Human Rights	CEHR
Commission for Social Care Inspection	CSCI
Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority	CICA
Criminal Records Bureau (part of the Home Office)	CRB
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills	The Department
Department for Children, Schools and Families	DCSF
Department for Communities and Local Government	The Department
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	The Department
Department for Energy and Climate Change	The Department
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Defra
Department for Transport	DfT
Department for Work and Pensions	DWP
Department of Health	DH
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (part of Department for Transport)	DVLA
Driving Standards Agency (part of Department for Transport)	DSA
English Sports Council (Sport England)	The Sports Council
Environment Agency	The Agency
Food Standards Agency	The Agency
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	FCO
Gas and Electricity Markets Authority	Ofgem
Government Actuary's Department (only certain functions to do with insurance companies)	GAD
Health and Safety Executive	HSE

Heritage Lottery Fund (see National Heritage Memorial Fund)	The Fund
Highways Agency (part of Department for Transport)	The Agency
HM Courts Service (part of Ministry of Justice)	HMCS
HM Prison Service (part of Ministry of Justice)	The Prison Service
HM Revenue and Customs	HMRC
Her Majesty's Treasury (but not National Savings and Investments)	HM Treasury
	IPS
Identity and Passport Service (part of Home Office)	The Commissioner
Immigration Services Commissioner	ICE
Independent Case Examiner	ICO
Information Commissioner's Office	
	The Registry
Land Registry	The Commission
Law Commission	The Council
Learning and Skills Council for England	LSC
Legal Services Commission	
	MoD
Ministry of Defence	MoJ
Ministry of Justice	
	NAO
National Audit Office	NICO
National Insurance Contributions Office (part of HM Revenue & Customs)	
	Ofsted
Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills	Ofcom
Office of Communications (Ofcom)	OFT
Office of Fair Trading	
	The Board
Parole Board	The Regulator
Pensions Regulator	The Inspectorate
Planning Inspectorate (part of Department for Communities and Local Government)	
Postal Services Commission	Postcomm
	RPA or The Agency
Rural Payments Agency (part of Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs)	
	The Authority
Security Industry Authority	TCO
	TSol
	The Service
Tax Credits Office (part of HM Revenue & Customs)	
Treasury Solicitor's Department	UKBA or The Agency

Tribunals Service (part of the Ministry of Justice)	UK Sport
UK Border Agency (part of Home Office)	VOA
UK Sports Council	The Service
Valuation Office Agency (part of HM Revenue & Customs)	Ofwat
Valuation Tribunal Service	
Water Services Regulation Authority	

This list is not exhaustive. If the body you are investigating is not listed above and you are unsure of the acceptable abbreviation, please contact REPT.

Further reading

Use the most recent desk version of the Oxford English Dictionary to check spellings and language usage.

For queries on grammar and usage, see the most recent edition of Fowler's English Usage.

John Seely's Oxford A - Z of Grammar and Punctuation 2009 is very useful.

For checking the names of drugs, use the most up-to-date British National Formulary.

If all else fails, contact REPT.

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning (3rd-party organisations in italics)	Notes
AA	Dame Julie Mellor	The Ombudsman
ACAS	<i>Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service</i>	
AI	Associate Investigator	
AM	Assessment Manager	
BERR	<i>Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform</i>	No longer exists. Formerly DTI
BIA	<i>Border and Immigration Agency</i>	No longer exists. Now part of UKBA
BIS	<i>Department of Business, Innovation and Skills</i>	Formerly BERR
BIOA	<i>British and Irish Ombudsmen Association</i>	Now Ombudsman Association
BSO/BSA	Business Support Officer/Business Support Assistant	
BTB/BTI	Body to be Assessed/Body to be Investigated	
CAB	<i>Citizens Advice Bureau</i>	
CAFCASS	<i>Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service</i>	
CC	Continuing Care	
CEO/COO	Chief Executive Officer/Chief Operating Officer	
CICA	<i>Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority</i>	
CICAS	<i>Communications & Internet Services Adjudication Scheme</i>	For complaints about certain phone, mobile and internet companies
CMEC	<i>Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission</i>	Of which CSA is a part of
CMHT	Community Mental Health Team	
CMS	Case Management System	
CPS	<i>Crown Prosecution Service</i>	
CQC	<i>Care Quality Commission</i>	Regulator of health and social care in England, took over regulatory duties from the HCC and CSCI
CRB	<i>Criminal Records Bureau</i>	Now Disclosure & Barring Service

CSA	<i>Child Support Agency</i>	Part of DWP and CMEC
CSCI	<i>Commission for Social Care Inspection</i>	Now amalgamated into the Care Quality Commission
CSO	Customer Service Officer	
CSTL	Customer Service Team Leader	
CTC	Child Tax Credit	
DCA	<i>Department for Constitutional Affairs</i>	No longer exists. Now part of MOJ
DCFS	<i>Department for Children, Schools and Families</i>	Now known as the Department for Education
DCLG	<i>Department for Communities and Local Government</i>	
DCMS	<i>Department for Culture Media and Sport</i>	
DCS	<i>Disability and Carers Service</i>	Part of DWP and the Pension, Disability and Carers Service (PDCS)
DEFRA	<i>Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs</i>	
DfE	<i>Department for Education</i>	Formerly the DCSF
DFES	<i>Department for Education and Skills</i>	No longer exists. Now part of BIS
DFT	<i>Department for Transport</i>	
DH/DoH	<i>Department of Health</i>	
DIUS	<i>Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills</i>	No longer exists. Formerly DfES and some functions of DTI, now part of BIS
DPA	Data Protection Act 1998	
DSA	<i>Driving Standards Agency</i>	Part of DFT
DTI	<i>Department for Trade and Industry</i>	No longer exists. Now part of BIS
DVLA	<i>Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency</i>	Part of DFT
DWP	<i>Department for Work and Pensions</i>	
EB	Executive Board	
EPA	External Professional Adviser	
FA	Further Assessment	
FCO	<i>Foreign and Commonwealth Office</i>	

FOI	Freedom of Information	
FSO	<i>Financial Ombudsman Service</i>	For complaints about financial institutions (e.g. banks and insurance companies)
GDC	<i>General Dental Council</i>	
GMC	<i>General Medical Council</i>	For complaints about doctors' fitness to practice
GP	General Practitioner	
HC or HCC	<i>Healthcare Commission</i>	2nd Tier complaints handler for NHS complaints until April 2009. Regulatory functions now taken over by the CQC
HMCS	<i>HM Courts Service</i>	
HMRC	<i>HM Revenue and Customs</i>	Formerly 'Inland Revenue' and 'HM Customs and Excise'
HSC	Health Service Commissioner	Another name for the Health Service Ombudsman
HSE	<i>Health and Safety Executive</i>	
ICAS	<i>Independent Complaints Advocacy Service</i>	
ICE	<i>Independent Case Examiner</i>	2nd Tier complaints handler for DWP bodies
ICM	<i>Independent Complaints Monitor</i>	2nd Tier complaints handler for CRB
ICO	<i>Information Commissioner's Office</i>	For complaints about Data Protection and Freedom of Information
ICR	<i>Independent Complaints Reviewer</i>	2nd Tier complaints handler for Land Registry, Charity Commission, Housing Corporation and National Archives
IM	Investigation Manager	
IO	Investigating Officer	
IPA	Internal Professional Adviser	
IPCC	<i>Independent Police Complaints Commission</i>	For complaints about Police in England
IR	Independent Review	
IRP	Independent Review Panel	
JACO	<i>Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman</i>	For complaints about judicial appointments process and about judicial conduct and discipline
JCP	<i>Jobcentre Plus</i>	Part of DWP
JR	Judicial Review	

JSA	Jobseekers' Allowance	Benefit administered by JCP
LGO	<i>Local Government Ombudsman</i>	For complaints about councils and social services in England
LR	Local Resolution	
LSC	<i>Learning and Skills Council OR Legal Services Commission</i>	The Learning and Skills Council was replaced by the Skills Funding Agency and the Young People's Learning Agency
MHA	Mental Health Act 1983	
MHAC	<i>Mental Health Act Commission</i>	For complaints about care and treatment under MHA. This function has been taken over by the CQC.
MHT	Mental Health Trust	
MOD	<i>Ministry of Defense</i>	
MOEC	Making Our Expertise Count	PHSO Early Adopter scheme for health cases prior to the dissolution of the HCC
MOJ	<i>Ministry of Justice</i>	Formerly the Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA)
MP	Member of Parliament	
NFA	No further action	
NHS	<i>National Health Service</i>	
NICO	<i>National Insurance Contributions Office</i>	Part of HMRC
NPM	Not Properly Made	No MP referral or for health cases, not in writing
OFCOM	<i>Office of Communications</i>	
OFSTED	<i>Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills</i>	
OFT	<i>Office of Fair Trading</i>	
OIAHE	<i>Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education</i>	For complaints about Higher Education bodies
OM	Operations Manager	
OOJ	Out of Jurisdiction	
OTELo	<i>Office of the Telecommunications Ombudsman</i>	For complaints about certain phone/mobile/internet companies
PASC	<i>Public Administration Select Committee</i>	Committee to which Ann Abraham answers to. Aiden Burley MP is the Chairman.

PCA	Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration	Another name for the Parliamentary Ombudsman
PCS	<i>Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards OR Public and Commercial Services Union</i>	
PCT	Primary Care Trust	No longer in existence as of April 2013, replaced by NHS Local Area Teams
PDCS	<i>Pension, Disability and Carers Service</i>	Formed in April 2008, consisting of TPS and DCS
PGA	Principles of Good Administration	
PGO	<i>Public Guardianship Office</i>	
PHSO	Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman	
PPO	<i>Prisons and Probation Ombudsman</i>	For complaints from prisoners, those on probation and those held in immigration removal centres
RB	Refer-back	Send case back to complainant for an MP referral or final response from NHS body
SHA	Strategic Health Authority	No longer in existence as of April 2013, responsibilities passed to NHS England
SIA	<i>Security Industry Authority</i>	
SIO	Senior Investigation Officer	
SFA	<i>Skills Funding Agency</i>	An agency of BIS, took over a portion of the duties of the Learning and Skills Council along with the YPLA
SPSO	<i>Scottish Public Services Ombudsman</i>	For complaints about Scottish public services including health bodies
SS	<i>Social Services</i>	OOJ. Under jurisdiction of LGO.
TAO	<i>The Adjudicator's Office</i>	2nd tier complaints handler for HMRC, VOA, PGO, and Involuntary Service
TCO	<i>Tax Credits Office</i>	Part of HMRC
TFL	<i>Transport for London</i>	OOJ. Under jurisdiction of LGO.
TPS	<i>The Pension Service</i>	Part of DWP and the newly formed PDCS
UKBA	<i>UK Border Agency</i>	Formerly the Border and Immigration Agency
VF	Visual Files	
VOA	<i>Valuation Office Agency</i>	
WTC	Working Tax Credit	
YPLA	<i>Young People's Learning Agency</i>	An agency of BIS, took over a portion of the duties of the Learning and Skills Council along with the SFA

Preliminary Assessments and Closure Codes

Enquiry closure types - why we closed an enquiry

1. In remit	Ineligible complainant
	Body out of jurisdiction
	Exercise of judicial/legislative function
	Administrative action taken on judicial authority
	Actions abroad other than consular functions
	Commencement/conduct of civil/criminal proceedings
	Criminal investigation or national security
	Commercial/contractual matters
	Public service personnel matters
	Pre-1996 clinical matters
	Private health care (not NHS funded)
	Three year rule
	Alternative legal remedy achieved
	Out of remit - other
	In remit
2. Properly made	N/A (out of remit)
	No MP referral
	Not properly made - not in writing
	Properly made
3. Premature	N/A (out of remit or not properly made)
	Not reasonable to pursue complaints procedure
	Local resolution not started
	Local resolution ongoing
	Local resolution not fit for purpose
	Further work required by body
	Pre second tier
	Not premature

Enquiry action - what we did with an enquiry

Closure codes	Declined with explanation and no other action
	Linked to lead case
	Referred in remit enquiry to body/second tier

Referred out of remit enquiry to body
Referred to other Ombudsman/complaint handler
Referred to other source of advice
Sent by PHSO to body/2nd tier
Withdrawn - no further action
Injustice remedied by PHSO
Intervention short of an investigation
Value added by PHSO
Other

Parliamentary Cases - setting up, your enquiries and your assessment

Professional representative:

This may be a solicitor, Citizen's Advice Bureau adviser or other advocacy service. If there is a particular individual who needs to be contacted at the representative organisation, add that to the case individual using the Organisation Contacts button.

Complainant:

This is the person making the complaint. This person may be represented by a professional representative and/or may be making the complaint on behalf of another individual, the aggrieved (who for some reason is unable to make the complaint themselves or have given the complainant consent to make the complaint on their behalf).

Aggrieved:

If the aggrieved is deceased and we have the date of death on file, please add that date to the communications issues section of the individual's VF record. Also, put a coloured tag on the piece of correspondence on file which confirmed the date of death.

MP

If the case is properly made it will have been referred to us by an MP. Their details should always be recorded.

Dealing with Parliamentary Cases

Not Properly Made (No MP referral) - Premature

- Create VF case
- Date stamp and initial if appropriate
- Press acknowledgement button and acknowledge
- Check for evidence that local resolution and 2nd tier (if relevant) not exhausted
- Once established, press ready for assessment button
- Draft proposal
- Draft response to complainant
- Complete preliminary assessment
- Scan original papers if necessary
- Get letter and proposal checked and agreed
- Send letter and return original papers if necessary
- Add note to VF confirming letter sent
- Close case

Not Properly Made (No MP referral) - not Premature

- Create VF case
- Date stamp and initial if appropriate
- Press acknowledgement button and acknowledge
- Check for evidence that local resolution/2nd tier (if relevant) exhausted
- Draft RB proposal and RB letter
- Get proposal and letter checked and agreed
- Send RB letter (returning any papers if necessary)
- Press Refer Back to Complainant button
- Set reminders to chase after 2 months if MP referral not received, and to close after 3 months if no referral received.
- If referral is received, action as appropriate for a properly made case.
- If no referral is received, close as appropriate (see RB guidance)

Properly Made (MP referral) - Premature

- Create VF case
- Date stamp and initial if appropriate
- Press acknowledgement button and acknowledge
- Check for evidence that local resolution and 2nd tier (if relevant) not exhausted
- Check to ensure it is MP referred
- Once established, press ready for assessment button
- Create blue case file
- Photocopy original papers to be returned, put papers in date order on file
- Draft proposal
- Add keywords to VF
- Draft responses to MP and complainant
- Complete preliminary assessment
- Scan any original papers in preparation for returning these to the complainant (we do not return the complaint form)

- Get proposal and letters checked and agreed
- Send letters and return original papers to the complainant if necessary
- Attach copies of signed letters and signed off drafts to file
- Add note to VF confirming letters sent
- Close case
- Retain file for 2 months, and then archive

Properly Made (MP referral) - not Premature - Sending to Case Assessment Team (CAT)

- Create VF case
- Date stamp and initial if appropriate
- Press acknowledgement button and acknowledge
- Check for evidence that local resolution/2nd tier (if relevant) exhausted
- Check to ensure it is MP referred
- Once established, press ready for assessment button
- Create blue case file
- Photocopy original papers to be returned, put papers in date order on file (our BSA can do this for you)
- Draft letter to complainant if we require their phone number or consent
- Get letters checked
- Identify the document/telephone call that confirms that complaints procedure is complete. If this is not already in the paper file, print this and add to the paper file, and label with a green tab
- Complete preliminary assessment explaining the decision to send to CAT, and make clear reference to the correspondence which confirmed the complaints process is complete (labelled with a green tab) See Casefile Structure Mini Guide for more information on how to do this.
- Send letters
- Scan any signed letters to file
- Add note to VF confirming letters sent
- Change case owner to the BSO of the team dealing with the body to assess
- Print case history and add to file
- Send file to the BSO in the Case Assessment Team

What is a contact?

A Contact is a request for information. It is not a Enquiry which is a request for us to investigate. These enquiries may be suitable to refer to our Corporate Queries Team.

If someone calls asking for our contact details, or if they want general information about the Office, and they are clear that they do not have a complaint that they need advice about that should be recorded as a Contact. A Contact can also be someone calling or writing to us by mistake, either dialling a wrong number or getting in touch to obtain or report information that we have no access to or dealings with (such as asking for an update on their tax rebate or trying to report a change of circumstances for their tax credits claim). It can also be asking for general information about the Office, our history etc.

The categories of Contacts appear on Vf when you press "Create Contact".

Select...

If the request is by telephone you should elicit enough information to be sure that it is just an information request.

If you find that the enquiry relates to a complaint or you are discussing complaints procedures and giving very detailed advice, it would be more appropriate to get further information and log the matter as an Enquiry. If you are in doubt about whether a call, email or letter you have received is a Contact seek advice from your manager.

Setting out HMRC complaints on VF

Not properly made - No MP referral

Body: HMRC

Preliminary assessment:

- In remit
- No MP referral
- N/A

Decline: Referred in remit enquiry to body/ 2nd tier

Properly Made and complaint not yet put to HMRC or still ongoing with HMRC

Body: HMRC

Preliminary assessment:

- In remit
- Properly made
- Pre local resolution

Decline: Referred in remit enquiry to body/ 2nd tier

Properly Made and complaint finished with HMRC but complainant has not approached Adjudicator

Body: HMRC

Preliminary assessment:

- In remit
- Properly made
- Pre Second Tier

Decline: Referred in remit enquiry to body/ 2nd tier

Properly Made and complaint finished with HMRC but complaint currently being considered by the Adjudicator

Body: Adjudicator's Office
Original Body: HMRC

Preliminary assessment:

- In remit
- Properly made
- Pre Second Tier

Decline: Referred in remit enquiry to body/ 2nd tier

Properly Made and complaint finished with the Adjudicator's Office - Pass to Case Assessment Team

Body: Adjudicator's Office
Original Body: HMRC

Preliminary assessment:

- In remit
- Properly made
- Not premature

Pass for further assessment

Don't forget Tax Credits Theme if the case involves Tax Credits!

Setting out DWP complaints on VF

Includes:

Jobcentre Plus (JCP)
Child Support Agency (CSA)
The Pension, Disability and Carers Service (PDCS)
Debt Management Unit (DMU)

Not properly made - No MP referral

Body to assess: JCP/CMEC/PDCS/DM

Preliminary assessment:

In remit

No MP referral

N/A

Decline: Referred in remit enquiry to body/ 2nd tier

Properly Made and complaint not yet put to DWP body or still ongoing with DWP body

Body to assess: JCP/CMEC/PDCS/DM

Preliminary assessment:

In remit

Properly made

Pre local resolution

Decline: Referred in remit enquiry to body/ 2nd tier

Properly Made and complaint finished with DWP body but complainant has not approached the Independent Case Examiner's Office (ICE)

Body to assess: JCP/CMEC/PDCS/DM

Preliminary assessment:

In remit

Properly made

Pre Second Tier

Decline: Referred in remit enquiry to body/ 2nd tier

Properly Made and complaint finished with DWP body but complaint currently being considered by ICE

Body to assess: ICE

Original Body: JCP/CMEC/PDCS/DM

Preliminary assessment:

In remit

Properly made

Pre Second Tier

Decline: Referred in remit enquiry to body/ 2nd tier

Properly Made and complaint finished with the ICE - Pass for further assessment

Body to assess: ICE

Original Body: JCP/CMEC/PDCS/DM

Preliminary assessment:

In remit

Properly made

Not premature

Pass for further assessment

Court related complaints

Complaint about HM Courts Service (HMCS)

In principle, PHSO can look into complaints about the administrative actions or poor service from HMCS staff. Such complaints can be about a County Court, Crown Court, Magistrates Court, Probate Service, Royal Court of Justice, and also HMCS's Area Director or Complaint Handling and Enquiries Team.

The HMCS complaints process is as follows:

1. Complain to the Court/Office involved
2. If dissatisfied with the response, ask for the complaint to be reconsidered by the Area Director (details can be obtained from the court/probate registry)
3. If dissatisfied with the Area Director's response, complain to the HMCS Complaint Handling and Enquiries Team at:

Complaint Handling and Enquiries Team
HM Courts Service
Zone C, 1st
Floor
102 Petty France
London SW1H 9AJ

Telephone: 0845 4568770
Fax number: 020 3334 4087
Disability Helpline/Textphone: Freephone 0800 358 3506
E-mail: customerservicecshq@hmcourts-service.gsi.gov.uk

4. If dissatisfied with the Customer Service Unit's response, complain to PHSO through an MP

Not within PHSO's remit:

Complaint about a Court decision

Make appeal to court in question as soon as possible. Perhaps also taking legal advice from **Community Legal Advice** on 0845 345 4 345.

Complaints about Solicitors

1. Complain to **Solicitor**
2. Complain to **Legal Complaints Service**
3. If dissatisfied with Legal Complaints Service's complaint handling, complain to the **Office of the Legal Services Ombudsman**

Complaints about Barristers

1. Complain to **Chambers** from which the Barrister works
2. Complain to **Bar Standards Board**
3. If dissatisfied with Legal Complaints Service's complaint handling, complain to the **Office of the Legal Services Ombudsman**

Complaint about the conduct of a Judge, Magistrate, Member of a small Tribunal or Coroner

1. Complain to **Office for Judicial Complaints**
2. If dissatisfied with Office for Judicial Complaints' complaint handling, complain to **Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman**

Complaint about Judicial Appointments (e.g. from candidate for judicial office)

1. Complain to **Judicial Appointments Commission**
2. If dissatisfied with Judicial Appointments Commission's complaint handling, complain to **Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman**

Useful contact details

Legal Complaints Service

Victoria Court
8 Dormer Place
Leamington Spa
Warwickshire
CV32 5AE

Helpline: 0845 608 6565
Switchboard: 01926 820082
Fax: 01926 431435
Email: enquiries@legalcomplaints.org.uk
Website: www.legalcomplaints.org.uk

Office of the Legal Services Ombudsman

3rd Floor
Sunlight House
Quay Street
Manchester
M3 3JZ

Lo Call No: 0845 601 0794
Telephone: 0161 839 7262
Fax: 0161 832 5446
Email: lso@olso.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.olso.gsi.gov.uk

Bar Standards Board

Complaints Team
289-293 High Holborn
London
WC1V 7HZ

Switchboard: 020 7611 1444
Complaints Information Line:
020 761 1445
Fax: 020 7611 1342
Web: www.barstandardsboard.org.uk

The Office for Judicial Complaints

10th Floor Tower
10.52
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

Telephone: 020 3334 2555
Fax: 020 3334 2541
Minicom: 020 3334 2668
Email: customer@ojc.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.judicialcomplaints.gov.uk

Office of the Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman
9.53
9th Floor
The Tower
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

Telephone: 020 3334 2900
Fax: 020 3334 2913
Email: headoffice@jaco.gsi.gov.uk
Web site: www.judicialombudsman.gov.uk

PCA Refer backs

We Refer-Back (RB) Parliamentary (PCA) cases when we have evidence that a complaint is ready to be passed for a further assessment. For example, when the complaint has completed the target body's internal complaints process, and if necessary, that of any subsequent second-tier or independent complaints handler, but does not have an MP referral. In such cases we contact the complainant to 'RB' the complaint, advising them to ask an MP. This is usually their local MP. However, if they live overseas, it is Bernard Jenkin MP, or their former local MP. Please note that any MP can refer a complaint to us, however there exists a Parliamentary Convention where an MP will not refer a complaint from a complainant who was not their constituent.

Once we have informed the complainant of the need to get their complaint referred by an MP, we give the complainant 3 calendar months to obtain that referral from the date of RB date in Visualfiles (VF).

If after 2 months we have not yet received the MP referral, we would send a reminder letter to the complainant stating a deadline (3 calendar months from the date of the RB) for them to get their complaint referred. If the complaint is not MP referred to us by the deadline, we would close the case as 'Withdrawn - Failed to get MP referral'. If the complaint is MP referred within the deadline, we would note this in VF and send it for further assessment.

When we RB a case, it effectively 'freezes' it from the day the RB was initiated, so that the CSO involved is not penalised for not completing a case should the complainant not be able to provide an MP referral within 40 working days.

The process for referring a complaint back for an MP referral is as follows:

1. Ensure you have evidence that the complaint is indeed one which could be passed for a further assessment (i.e. all internal and 2nd tier complaints processes are exhausted) and all that is required to do so is an MP referral. This could be through documentary evidence, written/verbal confirmation from the complainant or enquiries to the bodies involved.
2. Open the new case in VF, completing all the relevant complainant details and using the correct bodies. When the body complained about has a 2nd tier handling body (i.e. ICE or the Adjudicator's Office) put the 2nd tier body as the 'Body to be Assessed' and the body complained about as the 'Original Body'.
3. Press the 'Case acknowledged' button but do not select the 'Ready for assessment' button.
4. Make a proposal to 'RB for MP referral', providing details of the complaint and giving reasons for proposing the refer-back.
5. Should your proposal be approved, you can press the 'Refer back to complainant' button. Send any necessary letters or forms to the complainant.

Case acknowledged	Refer back to complainant	Ready for assessment
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Note that for PCA Refer backs, we do not select 'Ready for assessment' until the MP referral is received.

6. Make a personal note of the case number and date of the RB (it is advisable to have a personal spreadsheet for keeping track of your RBs).
7. If no MP referral has been received after 2 calendar months, send a reminder letter, giving them a deadline, which is 3 calendar months from the date of the RB. For example, if the date of the RB is 01/01/08, the reminder should be sent at or around 01/03/08 specifying a deadline of 01/04/08.

The Post Opening and Archive team can send these reminder letters for you. If you want any of the team to do a referback reminder letter please email them at the email address "RB Reminder" with:

1. The case number and name
2. Deadline date

It would also be helpful if you refer them to the history item in Visualfiles were you made the referback. That way they could refer to the letter or telephone conversation in which you first referred the complaint back

Customer Service Officers are responsible for the QA and sending off of the referback reminders.

8. If the complainant does not respond by the deadline, make a proposal to your manager to close the case as 'Withdrawn - Failed to get MP referral'. Once approved, the case can be closed. Please note that if you have stated a deadline of 01/04/08 the complainant has until the end of the day to get an MP referral in, so only close a case 3 months plus 1 day from the date of the RB. For example, if the date of the RB was 01/01/08 and you gave a deadline of 01/04/08 then you could close the case from 02/04/08 onwards.
9. If the complainant contacts us asking for more time before the case is closed, it is at your discretion as to how much time to allow them. You may wish to consult your manager.
10. If the MP referral arrives within the RB timeframe and we have all the relevant documentation to pass the case on for further assessment, ensure the incoming correspondence from the MP is logged, select the 'Ready for assessment' button from the Case creation screen, and action the case as normal.

PCA Scenarios

Confirmation that LR (and 2nd tier if necessary) complete	MP referral	Permissions and legal confirmation provided	Action
No	No	No	Treat as Not properly made, Pre-LR. Advise complainant to exhaust LR and to seek an MP referral.
No	No	Yes	Treat as Not properly made, Pre-LR. Advise complainant to exhaust LR and to seek an MP referral.
No	Yes	No	Treat as Pre-LR (or Pre-2nd Tier, if appropriate). Advise MP that complainant needs to exhaust LR (and 2nd Tier if necessary).
No	Yes	Yes	Treat as Pre-LR. Advise MP that complainant needs to exhaust LR.
Yes	Yes	Yes	Send for further assessment.
Yes	No	Yes	RB case for an MP referral.
Yes	No	No	RB case for an MP referral. Ask complainant to also provide permissions and legal confirmation.

Setting up Health Cases

ICAS or other advocacy service:

If ICAS or another advocacy service is representing the complainant the body will need to be put in the Professional Representatives field on VF. If there is a particular individual who needs to be contacted at that organisation, add that to the case individual using the Organisation Contacts button.

Complainant:

This is the person making the complaint. This person may be represented by a professional representative and/or may be making the complaint on behalf of another individual, the aggrieved (who for some reason is unable to make the complaint themselves or have given the complainant consent to make the complaint on their behalf).

Aggrieved:

If the aggrieved is deceased and we have the date of death on file, please add that date to the communications issues section of the individual's VF record. Also, put a coloured tag on the piece of correspondence on file which confirmed the date of death.

GP/Dentist complaint

Body to assess: GP/Dental Practice
Original Body:
Related Body: SHA and PCT
Named Person: Name of GP/Dentist (if applicable)

Hospital/NHS Trust complaint

Body to assess: Relevant NHS Trust
Original Body:
Related Body: SHA

PCT complaint

Body to assess: PCT
Original Body:
Related Body: SHA and PCT

SHA complaint

Body to assess: SHA
Original Body:
Related Body: SHA

Continuing Care complaint

Body to assess: SHA
Original Body: PCT
Related Body: SHA and PCT

Theme:
Continuing Care
Continuing Care - retrospective
Continuing Care - non-retrospective

Prison Healthcare

Body to assess: PCT
Original Body:
Related Body: SHA, PCT and Prison

Theme:
Offender and Detainee Healthcare

Adding a GP/Dental Practice on to VF

- Run a search on VF to ensure that the Practice (and if appropriate the relevant doctor/dentist involved) is not already on VF.
- If the Practice is not already on VF, ensure that you have the Practice's name and address (either from the complaint correspondence, NHS website or the Practice's website).
- Practices can only be added to VF by a superuser
You will need to send an email to the superusers asking them to enter the relevant Practice to VF, providing all contact details.
- For the sake of entering a body to assess on VF, you can temporarily use Unknown GP or Unknown Dentist until a superuser has informed you that the Practice has been added.

Named GP/Dentist

On reading the complaint, if it is clear that a complaint is about a particular GP or Dentist, you will need to add their details to the case under "Named Person". If the Named Person has the same name as the Practice (e.g. a complaint about Dr John Smith of the John Smith and Associates Practice) you do not have to add them as a Named Person.

After you have added the individual's contact details, you will be asked for a registration number. You will need to enter the doctor's General Medical Council (GMC) registration number (which you can find on the register at the GMC website), or the dentist's General Dental Council (GDC) registration number (which you can find on the register at the GDC website)

You will also need to add a Type, which in this case would either be "GP" or "Dentist".

Health Cases - Your Enquiries

For health cases you will need to establish whether a complaint is about an NHS service, if it is one which we potentially may look into and whether the complainant has exhausted the NHS complaints process.

Some reasons for the case not being in jurisdiction may be one of the following:

- Complaint is a personnel issue;
- Complaint is a contractual matter which cannot be looked into under the NHS complaints process;
- Complaint is about data protection (e.g. access to medical records) and would be more suited for the Information Commissioner;
- Complaint is about privately funded healthcare;
- Complaint is about care in a nursing home which was not NHS funded;
- Complaint is about pre 1996 clinical issues;
- Complainant is asking for help in arranging for care and treatment to be given; or
- Complainant is asking for general medical advice or for general NHS information.

Establishing the status of the complaint:

Make telephone enquiries to the complainant, the complainant's representatives (e.g. ICAS) the relevant bodies involved to establish which stage the complaint is at in the NHS complaints process.

You can use the NHS website www.nhs.uk to search for details of hospitals, GP/Dental practices, NHS Trusts and PCTs etc. For complaints about GPs and dental practices, your enquiries regarding local resolution should be put to the relevant practice manager. For complaints about NHS hospitals, PCTs and Trusts you should contact the complaints team at the relevant NHS Trust involved.

If possible, try to get hold of copies of any decision letters, particularly if a case is to go for further assessment.

You can still help if a case is premature

If a case is clearly premature, ask yourself if there is anything you can do, whilst remaining impartial, to assist the complainant. For example, if the complainant has approached us because they have not received a response to their complaint from the Trust you can ask the Trust when they expect to send a response and relay that to the complainant. If a complainant does not know what is happening with his complaint which is still in local resolution you can ask if it would be possible for the Trust to send the complainant an update on the case (perhaps copying you into it).

Health Cases - Your Assessment

Any health complaint which has been submitted to us in writing (letter, email, fax) is deemed to be **properly made** and will therefore need a paper file made up for it.

Preliminary assessment fields for **in remit, properly made** health cases will be as follows:

Pre LR:

In remit
Properly made
Pre local resolution

Ready for further assessment:

In remit
Properly made
Not premature

Preliminary assessment fields for **in remit**, **not properly made** health cases (made by telephone) will be as follows:

In remit

Not Properly made - not in writing

N/A (not properly made)

Before completing the preliminary assessment on a premature case you will have to choose health keywords and a health service user keyword. VF will prompt you to do this.

If closing an **in remit**, **premature** health case you will use the following closure code:

Referred in remit enquiry to body/ 2nd tier

GP complaints

Stage 1: Complain to Practice Manager

Stage 2: Complain to PHSO

If a complaint about a doctor is regarding their fitness to practice the complainant may wish to approach the General Medical Council (GMC). Please consult your manager if you believe this may be the case.

1. Has the complaint been put to the Practice Manager?

Yes - go to question 2

No - Treat as **Pre-LR** - advise complainant to put complaint to Practice Manager

2. Has the practice issued a final response to the complaint?

Yes - Complaint is **not premature** and ready for PHSO to consider - **Pass for further assessment**

No - Treat as **Pre-LR** - advise complainant to await final response and to re-approach PHSO if they remain dissatisfied

Dentist complaints

Stage 1: Complain to Practice Manager
Stage 2: Complain to PHSO

If a complaint about a dentist is regarding their fitness to practice the complainant may wish to approach the General Dental Council (GDC). Please consult your manager if you believe this may be the case.

1. Has the complaint been put to the Practice Manager?
Yes - go to question 2
No - Treat as **Pre-LR** - advise complainant to put complaint to Practice Manager
2. Has the practice issued a final response to the complaint?
Yes - Complaint is **not premature** and ready for PHSO to consider - **Pass for further assessment**
No - Treat as **Pre-LR** - advise complainant to await final response and to re-approach PHSO if they remain dissatisfied

Hospital Complaints

Stage 1: Complain to Chief Executive of NHS Trust which the hospital provides services for
Stage 2: Complain to PHSO

1. Has the complaint been put to the Chief Executive of the relevant NHS Trust?
Yes - go to question 2
No - Treat as **Pre-LR** - advise complainant to put complaint to the Chief Executive
2. Has the Chief Executive issued a final response to the complaint?
Yes - Complaint is **not premature** and ready for PHSO to consider - **Pass for further assessment**
No - Treat as **Pre-LR** - advise complainant to await final response and to re-approach PHSO if they remain dissatisfied

Trust/PCT complaint

Stage 1: Complain to Chief Executive of the Trust/PCT
Stage 2: Complain to PHSO

1. Has the complaint been put to the Chief Executive of the relevant NHS Trust?
Yes - go to question 2
No - Treat as **Pre-LR** - advise complainant to put complaint to the Chief Executive
2. Has the Chief Executive issued a final response to the complaint?
Yes - Complaint is **not premature** and ready for PHSO to consider - **Pass for further assessment**
No - Treat as **Pre-LR** - advise complainant to await final response and to re-approach PHSO if they remain dissatisfied

Continuing Care complaint

Stage 1: Exhaust all complaints/appeals procedures at PCT and SHA levels
Stage 2: Complain to PHSO

1. Has the complaint been put to the original PCT?
Yes - go to question 2
No - Treat as **Pre-LR** - advise complainant to put complaint to the Chief Executive of the PCT
2. Has the Chief Executive issued a final response to the complaint?
Yes - go to question 3
No - Treat as **Pre-LR** - advise complainant to await final response and to appeal to the SHA if not satisfied
3. Has the complainant appealed to the SHA about the PCT's decision?
Yes - go to question 4
No - Treat as **Pre-LR** - advise complainant to appeal to the SHA
4. Has the SHA given a final decision?
Yes - go to question 5
No - Treat as **Pre-LR** - advise complainant to await decision of appeal to the SHA
5. Is there any further right of appeal within the PCT/SHA process available to the complainant?
Yes - Treat as **Pre-LR** - advise complainant to exhaust any further right of appeal available
No - Complaint is **not premature** and ready for PHSO to consider - **Pass for further assessment**

Prison Healthcare complaint

- Stage 1: (a) Exhaust Prison's internal complaints process (complain to health staff, deputy governor and finally, the governor)
(b) If necessary, address concerns with commissioning PCT (some PCTs do not get involved with the prison health complaints process - make enquiries to the relevant PCT to find out if they need to be involved)
- Stage 2: Complain to PHSO

1. Has the complaint been put to the healthcare staff at the prison and received a response?
Yes - go to question 2
No - Treat as **Pre-LR** - advise complainant to put complaint to the healthcare staff at the prison
2. Has the complaint been put to the Deputy Governor and received a response?
Yes - go to question 3
No - Treat as **Pre-LR** - advise complainant to put complaint to the Deputy Governor
3. Has the complaint been put to the Governor at the prison and received a final response?
Yes - go to question 4
No - Treat as **Pre-LR** - advise complainant to put complaint to the Governor and to await a final response
4. Does the complaint need to be considered by the commissioning PCT?
Yes - go to question 5
No - Complaint is **not premature** and ready for PHSO to consider - **Pass for further assessment**
5. Has the complaint been put to commissioning PCT?
Yes - go to question 6
No - Treat as **Pre-LR** - advise complainant to put complaint to the PCT
6. Has the PCT issued a final response to the complainant?
Yes - Complaint is **not premature** and ready for PHSO to consider - **Pass for further assessment**
No - Treat as **Pre-LR** - advise complainant to await final response from PCT before re-approaching PHSO

Private Healthcare complaints

By law the Ombudsman cannot look into complaints about privately funded healthcare. Unfortunately, there is no independent complaint handler for complaints about private healthcare at this time. Generally, if a complainant is unhappy about the treatment or service they have received from a private healthcare provider they will need to complain to them directly.

The preliminary assessment will be:

Private health care (not NHS funded)

N/A (out of remit)

N/A (out of remit or not properly made)

With the closure code:

Referred to other Ombudsman/complaint handler

You can advise the complainant to try contacting one of the following organisations who may be able to tell them how to take forward their complaint:

Independent Healthcare Advisory Services

A subscription based membership association for private healthcare, which also provides advice to independent healthcare providers about dealing with complaints. Can give advice to members of the public who wish to make a complaint.

Website: <http://www.independenthealthcare.org.uk/index.php?/complaints-information-for-patients.html>

Trading Standards

Provides advice and guidance for consumers who are in dispute with goods and services providers.

Website: <http://www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/>

Consumer Direct

Government funded service to help you sort out problems and disagreements you may be having with suppliers of goods and services. Links with local trading standards offices.

Tel: 08454 04 05 06

Website: <http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/>

Citizens Advice

Provides free, confidential and independent advice for people to help them resolve their consumer issues.

Website: <http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>

Health Cases - Refer backs

We send health cases for a further assessment under the following circumstances:

- The complaint is in remit and properly made (in writing);
- The complaint has exhausted Local Resolution (LR);
- We have documentary evidence including a copy of the relevant NHS body's final response to the complaint (*having a copy of the final response is not always required to send the case for further assessment, but is preferable*).

We Refer-Back (RB) a health case to the complainant under the following circumstances:

- We are satisfied that a complaint has exhausted LR but the complaint is not properly made (for example, it was received by telephone).

If a complaint is properly made we CANNOT RB it. We can obtain the documents we require from the NHS body concerned, even without consent. Although it is preferable for us to have the complainant's confirmation that we have permission to obtain papers and medical records, the HSC Act states that the Ombudsman can require anyone to provide evidence relevant to the complaint. In such matters the Ombudsman has the same power as the Court to request the production of documents. See Section 12 paragraph 1 and paragraph 2(a) and (b).

Please refer to the table at the end of this guidance which outlines different scenarios under which a RB would or would not be appropriate.

In such cases we contact the complainant to 'RB' the complaint, advising them to send us documentary evidence including copies of the final response from the NHS body/bodies involved (and if they have not already done so, provide us with a statement of the complaint, relevant permissions and confirmation of not taking legal action).

Once we have informed the complainant of the need to provide us with the final responses, we give the complainant 1 calendar month to send in the relevant documents from the RB date in Visual Files (VF).

If after 2 weeks the complainant has not contacted us we send a reminder letter to the complainant stating a deadline (1 calendar month from the date of the RB) for them to send their papers to us. If the complainant does not provide the papers by the deadline, we would close the case as 'Withdrawn - Complainant failed to respond'. If the complainant does provide the papers, we would note this on VF and send it for a further assessment.

When we RB a case, it effectively, 'freezes' from the day the refer-back is initiated so that the CSO involved is not penalised for not completing a case on time should the complainant not be able to provide the relevant documentation within 40 working days.

The process for referring a complaint back for a final response from an NHS body is as follows:

11. Ensure you have some indication (e.g. written/verbal confirmation from the complainant) that the complaint has exhausted LR and all that is required to pass it on for a further assessment is to obtain a copy of the NHS Body's final response.
12. Open the new case in VF, completing all the relevant details of the parties involved in the complaint on the Case creation/Edit parties screen.
13. Press the 'Case acknowledged' button but **do not** select the 'Ready for assessment' button.
14. Make a proposal to 'Refer back for LR report' if you are referring back for a final LR response, providing details of the complaint and giving reasons for proposing the RB.
15. Should your proposal be approved by your line manager, you can press the 'Refer back to complainant' button on the 'Case creation'/'Edit details screen'. Send any necessary letters or forms to the complainant.



Note that for Health RBs, we do not select 'Ready for assessment' until the documentation we have requested is received.

16. Take a note of the case number and date of the refer back (it is advisable to have a personal spreadsheet for keeping track of your refer backs).
17. If the complainant does not respond after 2 weeks, send a reminder letter, giving them a deadline of 1 calendar month from the date of the RB. As for PCA RBs, the Post Opening and Archive team can send your reminders for you.
18. If the complainant does not respond by the deadline, on the next working day after the deadline, make a proposal to your manager to close the case as 'Withdrawn - complainant failed to respond'. Once approved, the case can be closed.
19. If the complainant contacts us asking for more time before the case is closed, it is at your discretion as to how much time to allow them. You may wish to consult your manager.
20. If the complainant provides the relevant documentation before the case is closed and we have all the relevant documentation and permissions to pass the case on for further assessment, ensure the incoming correspondence from the complainant is logged, select the 'Ready for assessment' button from the 'Case creation' screen, and action the case as one to send for further assessment.

HSC Scenarios - To RB or not RB?

Scenario	Properly made in writing?	Indication that LR complete?	Statement of complaint provided?	Legal clarification and Permissions provided?	Copy of final NHS response provided?	Action to be taken
1	No	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	Do not RB. Treat complaint as Not Properly Made.
2	Yes	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	Do not RB. Treat complaint as Pre-Local Resolution.
3	No	Yes	n/a	n/a	n/a	RB.
4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Do not RB. Send case for further assessment.
5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Do not RB. Sent for further assessment. You can obtain a copy of the final response from the Trust, however you will be writing to them to request their file anyway.
6	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Do not RB. You can request a copy of the final response from the Trust if this is required, however you will write to them anyway to request their file. You should also attempt to contact the complainant to get permission over the phone. If we do not have their contact number include the relevant paragraph in the acknowledgement letter.
7	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Do not RB. You can request a copy of the final response from the Trust if this is required, however you will write to them anyway to request their file. You should also attempt to contact the complainant to get permission over the phone. If we do not have their contact number include the relevant paragraph in the acknowledgement letter.
8	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Do not RB. Call the complainant if their number is available and get permission over the phone, and send the case for further assessment.
9	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Do not RB. Sent for further assessment, and ensure that we have the complainant's phone number so the assessor can contact them. If we do not,

						include the telephone number paragraph in the acknowledgement letter.
10	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Do not RB. Call the complainant to obtain permissions over the phone and pass for further assessment. If we do not have their contact number include the relevant paragraph in the acknowledgement letter.

Body OOJ cases

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman can look into complaints about government departments and their agencies, and also complaints about the NHS in England. The bodies which the Ombudsman can investigate are determined by the PCA and HSC Acts. However, a lot of complaints received by Customer Services are about bodies which are out of jurisdiction (OOJ) and the Ombudsman cannot legally investigate.

When we receive such complaints we respond by outlining the Ombudsman's role, explaining that the body they are complaining to us about is not in our jurisdiction and, if we can, recommend a body that they can complain to or seek further advice from.

Here are some examples of the more common OOJ bodies we are contacted about and whom complainants should complain to if they cannot resolve the complaint directly with that body:

- Local councils and Social Services in England > Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)
- Local councils, social services, health authorities in Wales > Welsh Public Services Ombudsman
- Local councils, social services, health authorities in Scotland > Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
- Police in England > Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC)
- Phone/Mobile networks and internet providers > Either the Communications & Internet Services Adjudication Scheme (CICAS) or Office of the Telecommunications Ombudsman (Otelco) depending on the provider
- Financial Institutions (banks, insurance companies, loan companies etc) > Financial Ombudsman Service
- Gas and Electricity companies > Energy Ombudsman
- Water companies > Consumer Council for Water
- Television and radio > Ofcom
- Members of Parliament > Leader of MP's party or Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

There are also various organisations which can provide advice on certain types of complaints (without necessarily investigating the complaint). For example:

- Citizens Advice Bureau - General advice on various topics and types of complaint
- Consumer Direct - General consumer complaints about private companies
- Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) - Advice about employment disputes
- Community Legal Advice - Free legal advice about a wide range of topics

The Process:

1. Assuming you have confirmed that it is indeed an enquiry and not a contact (ask your manager if you are not sure), make sure the case you have is indeed a new case by searching VF for the complainant's details
2. Ensure you are the case owner if you did not create the case
3. Ensure details on Case creation/Edit parties screen are correct
4. Ensure 'Case Acknowledged' button is pressed and the complainant has been sent an acknowledgement (very important!!)
5. Click on 'Ready for Assessment' when you are satisfied that the above details are correct
6. If the complaint is an email, ensure that the original email is attached to the VF case
7. Complete your proposal - include summary of complaint, action you propose, advice you will give complainant, preliminary assessment fields and closure code
8. Complete preliminary assessment screen with appropriate fields and decline the case
9. Draft a response. If it is an emailed enquiry it is advisable to draft your response in a Blank Word document on VF first of all so that it can be peer checked before you generate the email reply.
10. Print and pass the complaint, proposal and response to a manager (after it has been checked by your mentor).
11. Wait for a manager to approve the proposal and to check your response
12. Send the response, returning papers if the complaint was in letter form or attaching your response to VF if it was in email form (unless VF has already done this automatically)
13. Close the case using the appropriate closure code
14. Add details of the case to the Body OOJ01.xls spreadsheet in the 'CustomerServiceUnitG' folder in drive G. You may wish to add a shortcut to this spreadsheet on your desktop.

List of OOJ bodies

Body	Refer to	Notes
Airline	Air Transport Users Council	
Banks	Financial Ombudsman Service	
BBC	Ofcom	
Charity	Charity Commission	
Crown Prosecution Service	Attorney General's Office	The exception being Victim's Code complaints
Council housing	Local Government Ombudsman	
Electricity company	Energy Ombudsman	
Estate Agent	The Property Ombudsman	
Gas company	Energy Ombudsman	
Housing Association	Housing Ombudsman	
Higher Education	Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIAHE)	
Insurance company	Financial Ombudsman Service	
Internet Service Provider	Office of the Telecommunications Ombudsman (Otel) or Communications and Internet Services Adjudication Scheme (CISAS)	
Judges/Tribunal members/Coroners	Office for Judicial Complaints	Judicial complaints are outside of our remit
Local Education Authority (England)	Local Government Ombudsman	
Member of Parliament	Party Leader OR Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards	
Mobile phone network/provider	Otel or CISAS	
Northern Ireland health authority	Northern Ireland Ombudsman	
Police (England)	Independent Police Complaints Commission	The exception being Victim's Code complaints
Police (Scotland)	Police Complaints Commissioner for Scotland	
Private healthcare	Independent Healthcare Advisory Service	
Private dentist	Dental Complaints Service	
Rail company	Passenger Focus	
Retailer	Trading Standards (Consumer Direct)	
Royal Mail	Postal Redress Service	
Scottish health authority	Scottish Public Services Ombudsman	
Social Services (England)	Local Government Ombudsman	
Social Services (Scotland)	Scottish Public Services Ombudsman	
Social Services (Wales)	Public Service Ombudsman for Wales	
Solicitor	Legal Complaints Service	

Telephone company (i.e. BT)	Otelo	
Tour operator/Holiday company	Trade Association such as ABTA or AITO	
Trade Union	Certification Officer	
Tradesmen/Builders	Trading Standards (Consumer Direct)	
Transport for London	Local Government Ombudsman	
TV licence	BBC Trust	
Water company	Consumer Council for Water	
Welsh health authority	Public Service Ombudsman for Wales	

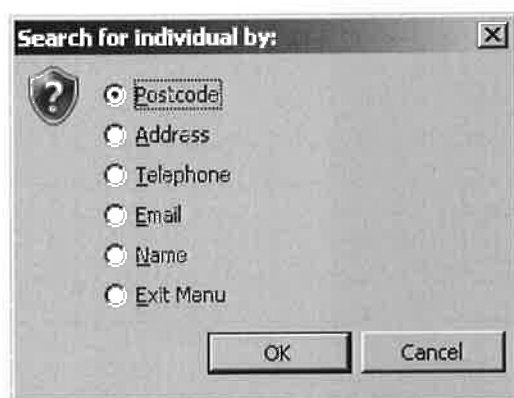
Visualfiles guidance for CS

Searching VF for a complainant

When logging a new complaint it is important that we find out if the complainant has contacted us previously before creating a new address record for the individual on VF. This is so that we avoid duplicate entries, and also to ensure that the complaint you have recently received is in fact new.



To search for a complainant click Individual Search. You should search for postcode, name and address. However, it is advisable to search under as many details as you have.



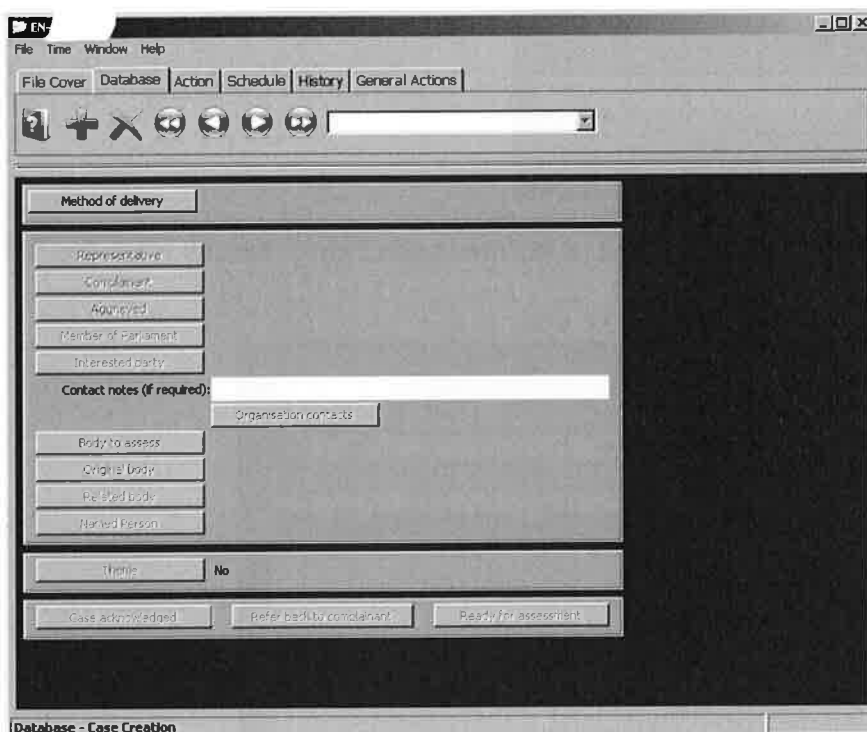
Once you have established that the complaint is new, you can proceed to log it on to VF.

Logging a new enquiry

Press the Create New Enquiry button. A new VF entry will open at the case File Cover.

The image shows a 'Create new enquiry' button with a folder icon and a plus sign. Below it is a screenshot of the 'File Cover' window. The window has a menu bar with 'File', 'Time', 'Window', and 'Help'. Below the menu bar are tabs for 'File Cover', 'Database', 'Action', 'Schedule', 'History', and 'General Actions'. The main area contains several sections: 'Case Owner' with a text field and 'Change case owner' button; 'File Holder: No paper file' with a 'Change file holder' button; 'Theme: No' and 'Risk:' with an 'Edit Risk' button; 'Status: Case Creation' and 'Target: 28/04/2010' with a 'Key dates and Joint Working' button; 'Representative:' with fields for 'Complainant:', 'Aggrieved:', 'MP:', 'Body:', and 'Original body:'. There is also a 'Telephone Numbers' button. At the bottom, there is a grid of buttons: 'General Actions', 'Edit Parties', 'Assessment', 'Allocation', 'Investigation', 'Case Closure', 'Compliance', 'Review', 'Clinical Advice', 'Assessment Action', and 'FOI/DP Requests'. The window title bar at the bottom says 'File Cover'.

Press the **Edit Parties** button first, which takes you to the following screen.



Press the **Method of Delivery** button. This will prompt you to enter how the complaint was received.



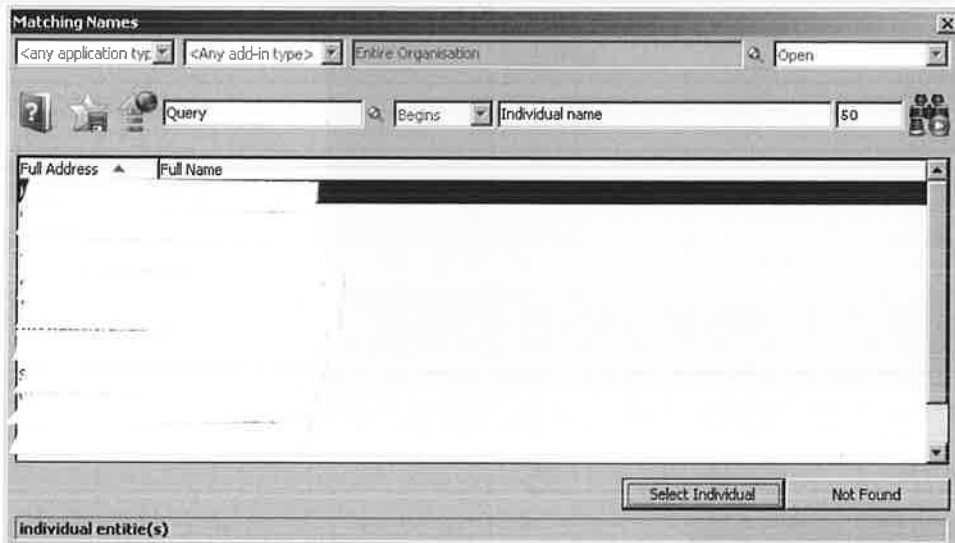
Your choice needs to accurately reflect the method of complaint to us, as this will affect the acknowledgement.

Once this has been selected, you should now enter the details of the complainant, the aggrieved if applicable, and any MP or professional representative who is involved.

The process for adding a complainant or an aggrieved to a complaint are identical. Click the **Complainant/Aggrieved** button.



If the complainant/aggrieved has contacted us before, select their details from the list that pops up.



If they have not contacted us before click No Match Found, and you will be prompted to add them to the database.



The first screen is for address details.

Database - Name and Address

Name

Family Name:

Given Name:

Title: Suffix: Gender:

Prisoner number:

Address

Building:

Street Number:

Street Name:

Locality:

Town:

County:

Postcode:

☐ Use for Organisation Contacts only

Job Title:

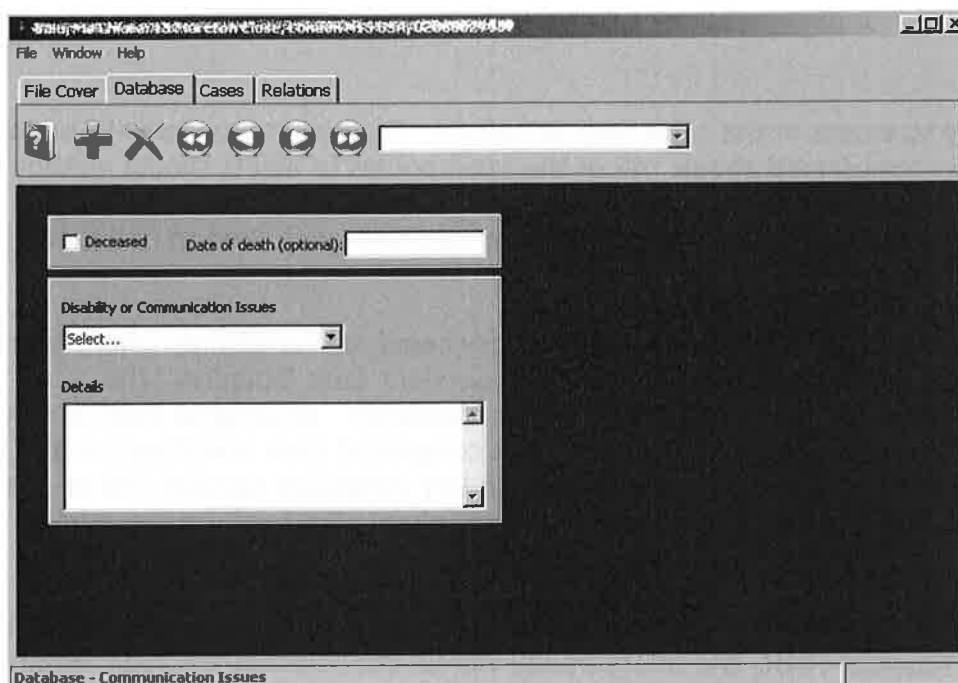
You can use the address finder if you have a postcode.

[illegible]

When you have completed the address and pressed OK, you will be taken to the telephone and email address details screen. Add as much detail as possible. Put any telephone numbers in without spaces. Make sure you click in the field labelled "No:" next to Daytime Contact - this will ensure that a contact number is noted as a daytime contact.

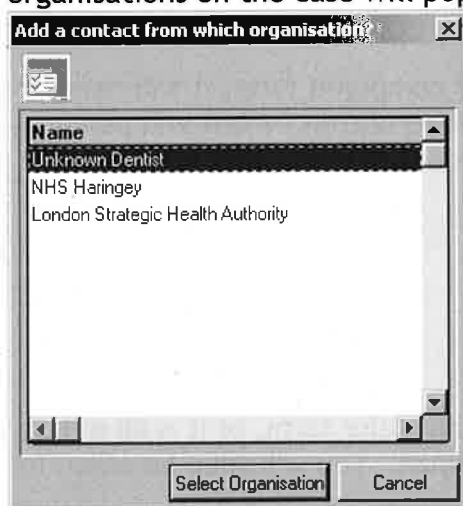
If the complainant has any communication issues or disabilities that affect how we communicate with them, you should add these. You can do so by clicking on the **Complainant** button and choosing to edit a complainant, and then pressing the **Communication Issues** button.

This screen also includes the option to note when someone is deceased. This is usually only used for the aggrieved, and when entering an aggrieved persons details it pops up automatically so we can note this, or any reasons for them needing someone to complain on their behalf. It is important we ensure we have any date of death noted, as this means we can try and avoid unnecessary upset on anniversaries.



You should also add any representative, such as an ICAS rep or a solicitor. You should click the **Representative** button and search for the representative. If they are not there you will not be able to add them yourself - this will need to be done by a superuser (all team leaders are superusers, plus).

If you add a representative you should, if possible, include an organisation contact for the representative. To do this, press the **Organisation Contacts** button. A list of the organisations on the case will pop up.



Select the organisation and it will tell you what contacts we hold for them. If the individual contact who has written to you from the representative is not there you will be able to add one.

If the case is a properly made Parliamentary complaint, or if an MP has forwarded a case on a constituent's behalf, the **MP** should also be added. All current MPs are listed.

Next add the **Body to assess** in the same way as before. The body to assess will usually be the organisation complained about. All of the main bodies to assess should already be listed, however some GP surgeries or dental practices may not be if they have not had previous complaints raised with us. In that event, a superuser will need to add their details to VF for you.

Original body is generally only used on Parliamentary cases, on complaints where there is a second tier complaint handler (such as the Independent Case Examiner, the Adjudicator's Office or the Independent Complaints Mediator). An original body is only added when the second tier complaints handler has completed their investigation and it is ready for us to consider. In such cases the second tier complaint handler will be the body to assess, and the government department complained about will be the original body.

On Health cases, the **Related body** information will then need to be entered. Where the body to assess is a Hospital Trust, the related body will be the relevant Strategic Health Authority. Where the body to assess is a Primary Care Trust, GP, dentist or other primary care provider the related bodies will be the Primary Care Trust and the Strategic Health Authority. If other organisations have been involved it may also be appropriate to add these as a related body too - seek advice on this if unsure.

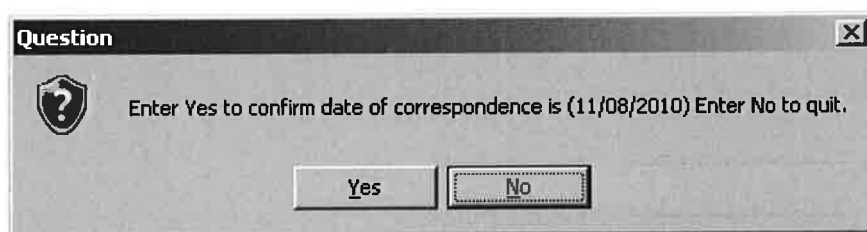
You should now add any **Theme** that is appropriate. These are used on cases relating to Continuing Care, Offender and Detainee Healthcare, Tax Credits, and many more. Please refer to Casework Policy and Guidance for details on Themes.

Acknowledgements - important!

If the complaint is one that arrived by email, letter or complaint form, it will need to be acknowledged. You should press the **Case acknowledged** button - a box will pop up asking you to choose whether the correspondence was dated or undated and the date of the correspondence.



If the complainant has put the date on the letter or complaint form, or it is an email, you should enter the date on the letter/complaint form/email. You will then be asked to verify that the date entered is correct.



For emailed complaints an email will open to send, noting the date of the email we have received. As all emails are dated VF will not allow you to choose “undated”.

For complaints that arrived by post (letters and paper complaint forms) an acknowledgement slip will be created, also with a note confirming the date of the correspondence. If the letter or complaint form was undated the acknowledgement slip will say this.

Paper files

Properly made complaints (Parliamentary cases referred by MP's or Health complaints that are in writing) should have a paper file created for them. For Health complaints, however, this can be discretionary as it isn't always appropriate to make up a whole file. If you do not make a paper file on a properly made premature Health complaint you should ensure that all the papers are scanned to VF so we have a copy, and the originals are returned to the complainant.

If you are creating a paper file, you should update the File Holder field on the File cover with your name by pressing the **Update file holder** button and selecting your name. Once you have updated the File Holder you cannot change it back to “no paper file”!



You should print off a file label, by going to the General Actions tab and pressing the **Print File Label** button. These should be printed to one of the label printers.



Parliamentary files are blue, Health files are white. The file will have yellow dividers - CS paper work goes at the very back, under “The complaint” divider. Signed copies of our responses should also be placed on the file, and copies of emails sent.

When you close a case, a print out of the full case history should be created and placed on the right hand flap of the file.

Logging a new contact

To create a new Contact, click the Create Contact button.



You should then choose the method of receipt of the contact.



Choose to **Add Comments**, and make a brief note in the box provided of the reason for the contact and your response to it.

<No Details Entered>

File Window Help

File Cover Database Cases Relations

?

Add New Contact

Staff ID:

Date: 08/03/2010

Method of Delivery: Phone

Add Comments

File Cover

<No Details Entered>

File Window Help

File Cover Database Cases Relations

New Contacts Details

Staff ID:

Date Field: 08/03/2010

Time: 12:09

Method of Delivery: Phone

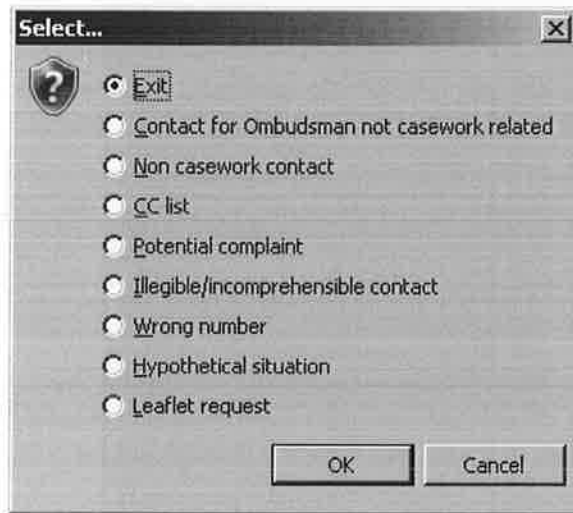
Comments:

Wrap up

Wrap Up:

Database - Contact Details

To close the contact, click the **Wrap up** button select the reason for the contact.



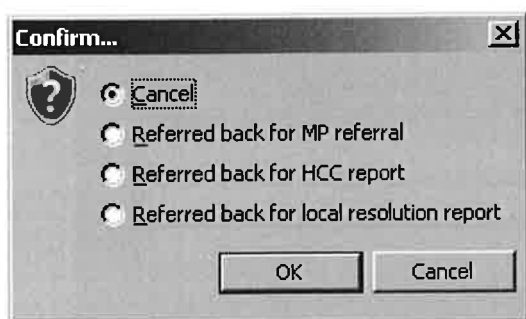
Preliminary assessment and refer back

Once you have logged your new enquiry and finished your consideration of the matters raised with us, you will be in a position to decide how we will proceed. This would usually involve either advising the complainant that the complaint is premature and to exhaust the complaints process, asking them to send in their papers (refer back), or passing the case for further assessment.

Refer back

If you believe that the matter being raised is ready for us to consider but the complaint is not properly made, it would be appropriate for the matter to be a refer back. Please see the Refer Back guidance for more information on specific refer back processes.

You would first need to put this course of action to your manager in a proposal. When your manager has agreed, you should press the **Refer back to complainant** button and select the refer back reason.



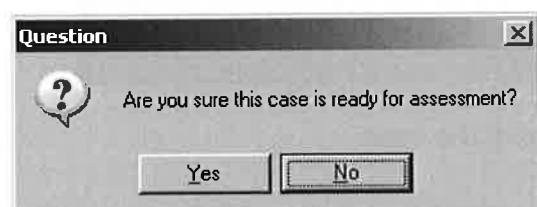
The case will then be at the status RB Waiting on the case File Cover, and should be chased (and then closed if necessary) as per the usual refer back timescales.



Once the complainant's papers or their MP referral arrive, you should decide as soon as possible what your next steps will be. If you need to seek further papers yourself in order to decide our view, you can leave the case at RB Waiting until the required documents are received. However, once you know whether the case is still premature or if it is ready for further assessment, you will need to complete a **preliminary assessment**.

Preliminary assessment - premature

If the case is definitely premature you should complete a **preliminary assessment**. Press the **Ready for assessment** button.



The case will then show as Under assessment - preliminary on the case File Cover.



For a premature complaint you should complete a proposal to submit to your manager (see page 15 for guidance on creating a proposal in VF), draft a response (to be peer checked before sending) and complete the preliminary assessment screen (which can be accessed by pressing the **Assessment** button on the VF case File Cover).

Assessment for body: <input type="text"/>		Jurisdiction: HS
Preliminary assessment		
In remit:	<input type="text"/>	
Properly made:	<input type="text"/>	
Premature:	<input type="text"/>	
<input type="button" value="Preliminary assessment complete"/> on: <input type="text"/> by: <input type="text"/>		
Further assessment		
<input type="button" value="Further assessment complete"/> on: <input type="text"/> by: <input type="text"/>		
Panel decision		
<input type="button" value="Decision"/>		Accepted on: <input type="text"/>
Decision details		
Decision Code: <input type="text"/>		
Decision Detail: <input type="text"/>		

Complete the relevant drop down boxes for the preliminary assessment, and press the Preliminary assessment complete button.

Preliminary assessment	
In remit:	<input type="text" value="In remit"/>
Properly made:	<input type="text" value="Not properly made - not in writing"/>
Premature:	<input type="text" value="N/A (out of remit or not properly made)"/>
<input type="button" value="Preliminary assessment complete"/> on: 23/02/2010 by: <input type="text"/>	

This will prompt you to chose that you are declining the case.

Confirm...		<input type="button" value="X"/>
<input checked="" type="radio"/> ? <input type="button" value="Cancel"/>		
<input type="radio"/> <input type="button" value="Pass case for further assessment"/>		
<input type="radio"/> <input type="button" value="Decline case"/>		
<input type="button" value="OK"/>		<input type="button" value="Cancel"/>

A box will then pop up prompting you to select the reason that the complainant has approached us prematurely.

Was this complaint made as a result of a previous not properly made or premature complaint?

☒ Cancel

☐ Yes

☐ No

OK Cancel

Why did the complainant make a complaint to PHSO?

☒ Cancel

☐ Unclear signposting/misdirection

☐ Hoping for a quick result

☐ Going straight to the top

☐ Loss of confidence/trust in body

☐ Media coverage

☐ Information provided by PHSO

☐ To make us aware of the problem

☐ Worried/anxious

☐ Other

☐ Didn't ask

OK Cancel

If the complainant has an earlier closed case a box will pop up asking you if this new complaint is as a result of a previous premature one. Choose yes or no as applicable.

Your proposal should then be passed to your manager, who will complete the panel decision, which allows you to proceed to close the case. Your response to the complainant should also be peer checked.

The response that we send to the complainant when we close the case should be saved to Visual Files if the complaint was not properly made (emails can be saved to Visual Files using the "Save to History" button in Outlook, and copies of signed letters can be scanned, emailed and saved to VF). If the complaint was properly made, copies of signed letters should be photocopied and placed on the paper file. The case history also should be printed and placed in the right hand flap of the paper file.

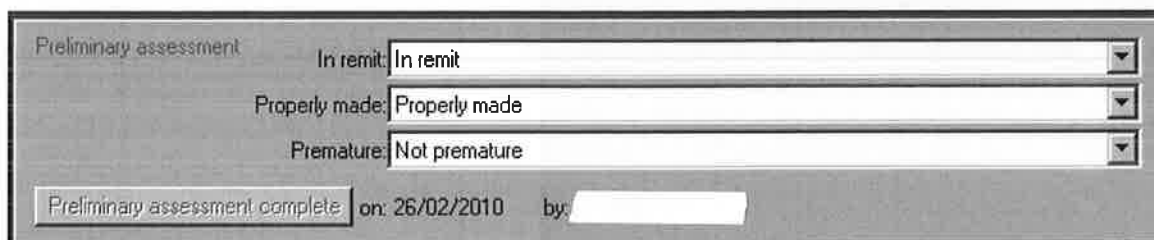
Keywords: if a complaint is properly made but you are declining it, you will be prompted to add keywords before you can complete the preliminary assessment. You do this by going to the **General Actions** tab and going to the Keywords section and selecting the appropriate button for the type of complaint: **Parliamentary** or **Health**. Please see the list of keywords for details of the different keywords you can use. For Health cases you will also need to enter details of the **Health Service User**.

Preliminary assessment - ready for further assessment

If we have all the papers to show that local resolution is complete, and the case is ready for further assessment, you should proceed as before and press the Ready for assessment button. You should then follow the process for **Passing cases for further assessment**.

Passing cases for further assessment

On the Assessment screen complete the drop down boxes for the preliminary assessment as appropriate and click the **Preliminary assessment complete** button.



The screenshot shows a form titled "Preliminary assessment". It contains three dropdown menus: "In remit" with the value "In remit", "Properly made" with the value "Properly made", and "Premature" with the value "Not premature". At the bottom, there is a button labeled "Preliminary assessment complete" followed by the text "on: 26/02/2010 by:" and a small white rectangular box for a signature or initials.

You will be prompted to choose that you are passing the case for further assessment.

Create the file - Parliamentary files are blue, Health files are white. The file will have yellow dividers - our paper work goes at the very back, under "The complaint" divider. A copy of our signed "Sent for further assessment" letter to the complainant should be saved to the file.

Print off a file label for the file by going to the **General Actions** tab and pressing the **Print File Label** button. These should be printed to one of the label printers.

You should change the case owner and file holder's name from your own to that of the Business Support Officer who receives the further assessment cases in the relevant assessment team.



The screenshot shows a form with two rows. The first row is labeled "Case Owner:" and has a text input field followed by a button labeled "Change case owner". The second row is labeled "File Holder:" and has a text input field followed by a button labeled "Change file holder".

To print off the history notes go to the **General Actions** tab, press the **Print case history** button on the top right hand side, and print the Full case history to add to the file.



The screenshot shows a dialog box titled "Would you like to print...". It contains three radio button options: "Full case history" (which is selected), "Part case history", and "Cancel". At the bottom of the dialog box are two buttons: "OK" and "Cancel".

When you pass the case for further assessment, a print out of the full case history should be created and placed on the right hand flap of the file.

Creating letters and proposals

Proposals

You can create your proposal in several ways. Some people create a history note and set out the proposal in that (see below), some create a Word document for their proposal.

The screenshot shows a software window with a sidebar on the left containing several icons. The main area is a large text box with the title "Description: 0012 - Assessment Note". To the right of the text box is a vertical list of dates: 02/11, 02/11, 02/11, 25/11, 08/11, and 08/11. The bottom of the window has a status bar with the text "ne-> 00:00:00; Charge-> 0.00; Cost-> 0.00".

To create a **history note** for your proposal, select the **General actions** tab or press the **General actions** button on the File cover. Press the **Add history item** button.

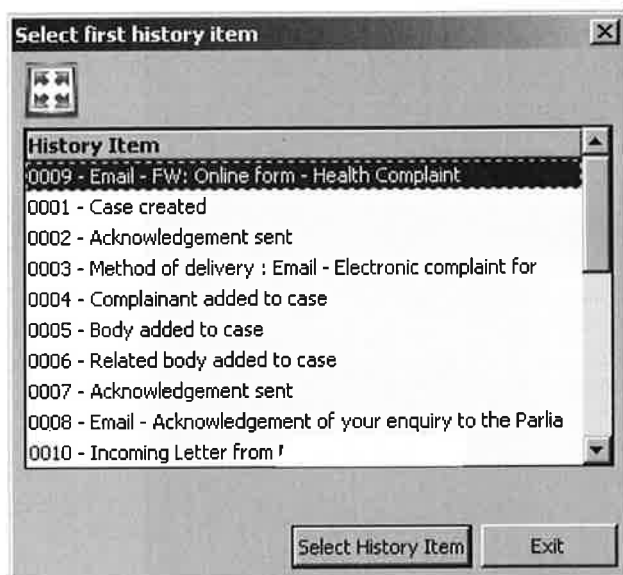
It will prompt you to name the history item, and a box will pop up for you to type your note in.

The image shows two overlapping Windows-style dialog boxes. The top dialog box is titled "Enter a heading for the minute" and contains a single-line text input field. The bottom dialog box is titled "Enter detailed notes" and contains a multi-line text area. Both dialog boxes have a question mark icon in a shield on the left and "OK" and "Cancel" buttons on the right.

Once completed this can then be printed out or emailed to the manager for a panel decision by going back to the **General actions** screen, pressing the **Print case history** button, and selecting Part case history.

The image shows a dialog box titled "Would you like to print...". It contains three radio button options: "Full case history" (which is selected), "Part case history", and "Cancel". There are "OK" and "Cancel" buttons at the bottom right. A question mark icon in a shield is located on the left side.

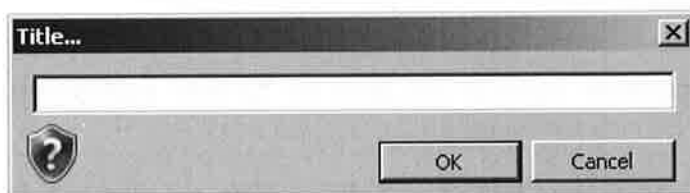
Select your proposal from the list of history items.



The resulting document can then be printed, or emailed to your manager.

To create a **Word document** for your proposal, go to the **General actions** screen and press the **Blank Word document** button.

You will be prompted to create a title for your document, and once this is done, the document will open ready for you to create your proposal.



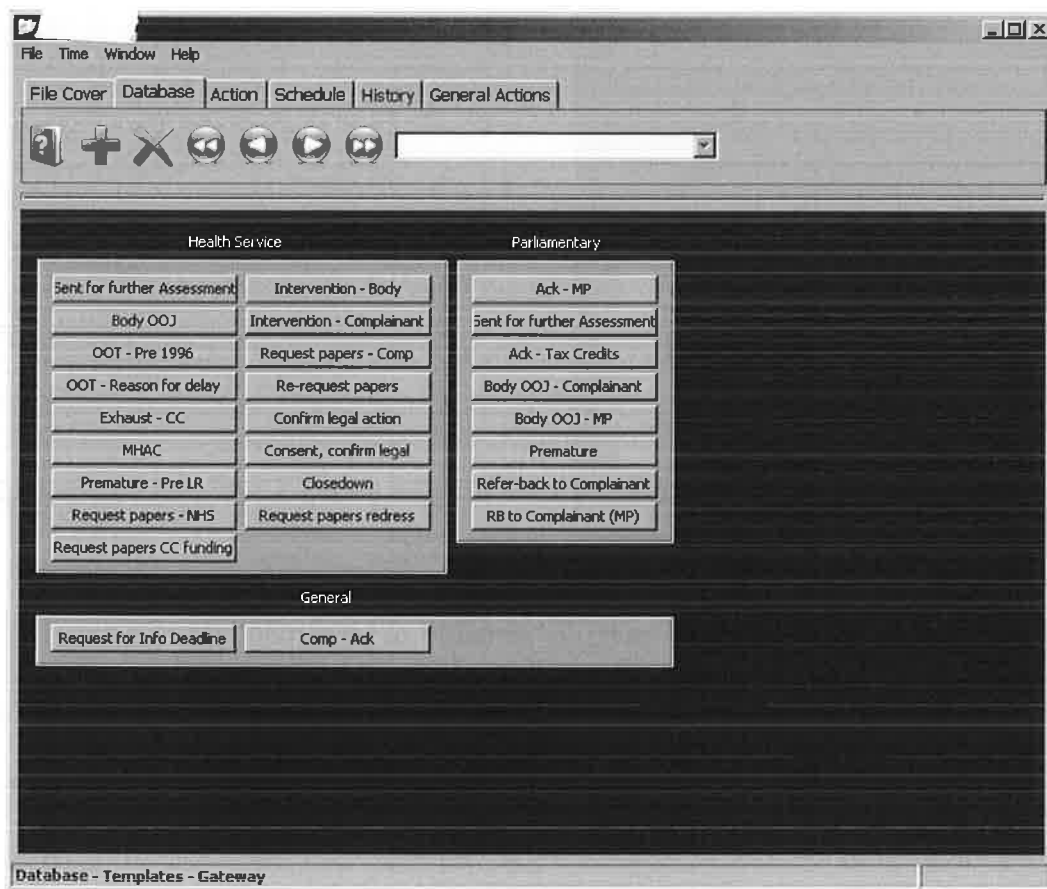
Letters

You can create blank letters and create responses from scratch, or you can use templates pre loaded into VF.

A blank letter can be created by going to the **General actions** screen and selecting **General letter template** from the block of buttons headed "General correspondence".

To select a VF template letter click on the **CS and A button** in the block of buttons headed "Letter templates".

Then select the letter you require.



The most commonly used letters in Customer Services are **Sent for further assessment**, **Ack-MP**, and **Request papers - NHS**.

The button **Comp ~ Ack** generates the A5 acknowledgement slip, which you also get when pressing the Case acknowledged button. This is handy if you need to reprint the ack slip for any reason.

Copies of signed letters or emails we have sent should be attached to the paper file if it is a properly made case. If it is not properly made or you are not creating a paper file, copies of signed letters/sent emails should be saved to VF. Emails can be saved to VF by pressing "Save to History" in Outlook, letters can be scanned and emailed to yourself and then saved to VF.

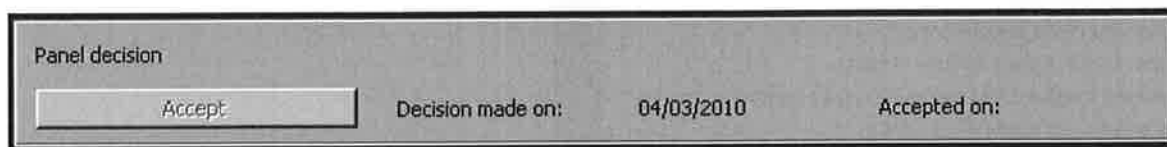
Closing cases

A case will be ready to close:

- When your proposal (premature or OOJ) is back from panel decision and your preliminary assessment and closure codes (and draft response) have been agreed;
- When a complainant has not provided papers or got an MP referral within the relevant timescale and your proposal for closing the refer back has been agreed by a manager.

Closing a case at preliminary assessment stage

You can only close a case that is at preliminary assessment stage once a manager has completed their panel decision in the Assessment screen.

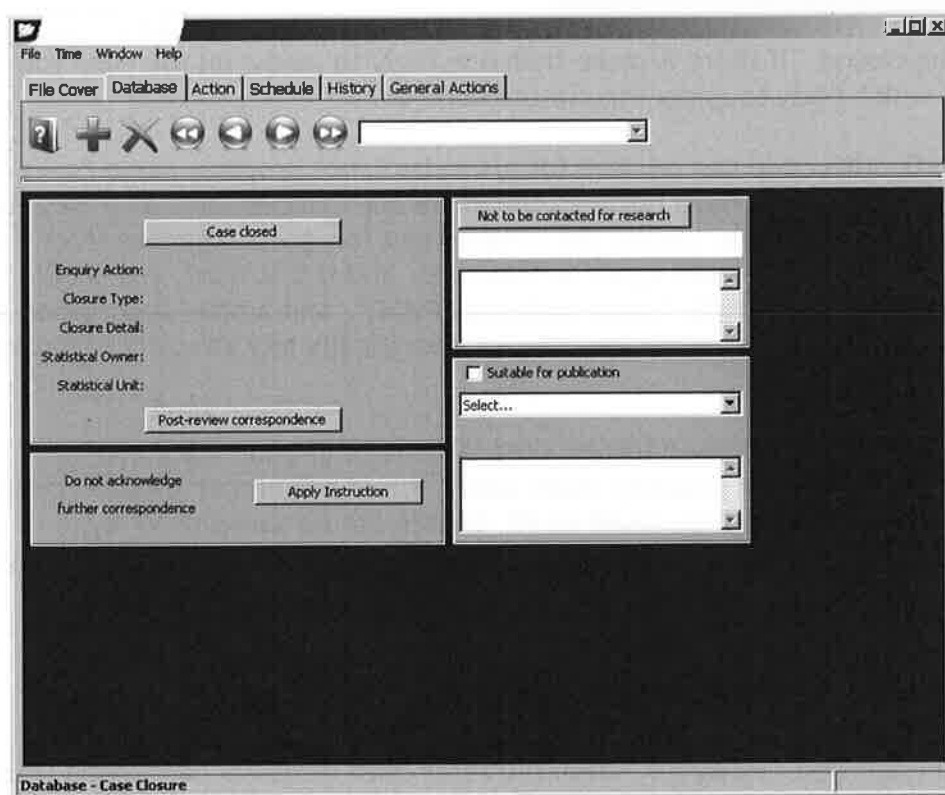


Panel decision

Decision made on: 04/03/2010 Accepted on:

Once the manager has done this you can proceed to send your (peer checked) response letter and close the case.

To close the case, from the File cover press the **Case closure** button. This takes you to the Case closure screen.



File Time Window Help

File Cover Database Action Schedule History General Actions

Case closed

Enquiry Action:
Closure Type:
Closure Detail:
Statistical Owner:
Statistical Unit:

Post-review correspondence

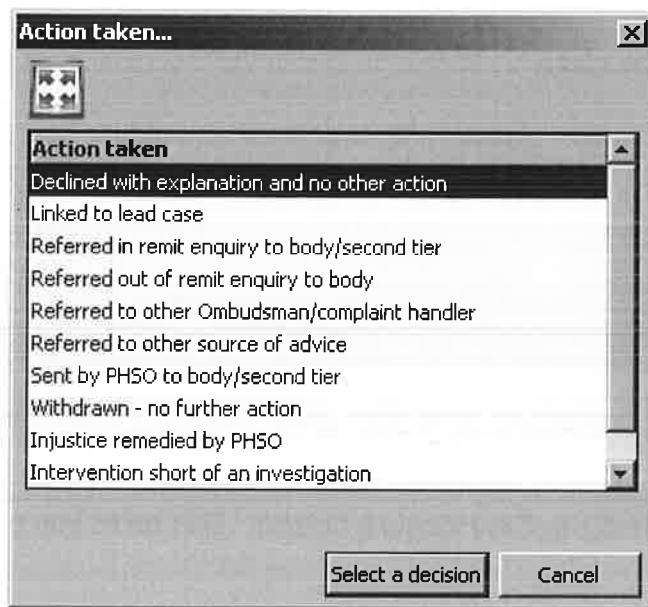
Do not acknowledge further correspondence

Not to be contacted for research

☐ Suitable for publication
Select...

Database - Case Closure

Press the **Case closed** button and select the agreed closure code.



The case will then be closed. If there is more than one body to assess on the case you will need to choose which body to apply the closure code to.

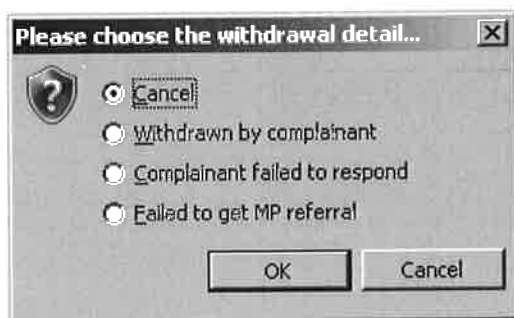
Value added by PHSO - this code can be used for premature/not properly made cases when our intervention appears to have resolved things for the complainant, or if we have been able to provide assistance that means the complainant has got a response from the body concerned. Your manager should agree to this code, and if it is used, you should add a history note to VF with the title "Value added by PHSO", and a brief description of the case, what you did, and the outcome (mentioning specifically any amounts of money that has been paid out as a result).

When you close a case, copies of signed letters or emails we have sent should be attached to the paper file if it is a properly made case. If it is not properly made, copies of signed letters/sent emails should be saved to VF. Emails can be saved to VF by pressing "Save to History" in Outlook, letters can be scanned and emailed to yourself and then saved to VF.

Closing a refer back case

A refer back case will not be at preliminary assessment stage, so your manager will not be able to do a panel decision. However, when the refer back deadline has passed (see the Refer Back guidance) you should do a proposal recommending that the case be closed, and send this to your manager to agree. They will add a note to VF to confirm they have agreed your proposal to close the refer back case. Once they have done this, click the **Case closure** button as before, and then the **Case closed** button.

You will be presented with a different set of options; select the closure code agreed by your manager.



You can also use this screen to note when a complainant has asked not to be contacted by us for research/survey.

