

What to do if you have a complaint

The Legal Ombudsman resolves complaints about legal services

We have official powers to resolve complaints.

We are independent and impartial and do not take sides. When we receive a complaint, we look at the facts so that we can reach a fair outcome for everyone involved. If we decide the service that you received was unsatisfactory, we can ensure your lawyer or law firm puts it right.

This leaflet tells you about the steps you can follow if you have a complaint about a legal service.

Issues we can help resolve

We can get involved in different types of complaints, for example, a service you received for wills, family issues, personal injury, and for buying or selling a house.

If you have a complaint...

Step 1: Tell your lawyer your concerns

As a customer of legal services you have the right to expect the highest possible standards of service and fairness from your lawyer. Sometimes, for many reasons, this is not what you receive.

If you are unhappy with a service, you must let your lawyer know so that they can resolve your concerns.

All lawyers and law firms must offer their customers a complaints handling procedure.

In the first instance you can request information about this process to find out how you can let them know about your concerns and to find out how the lawyer or law firm will respond. If there is an individual who holds responsibility for dealing with complaints, this will be your best point of contact.

You must give your lawyer a chance to resolve your complaint before the Ombudsman can get involved. Once you have a concern about an issue, it helps the process if you can act immediately. Overall, you should complain to your lawyer (or to us) within a year of when you realised there was a concern.

Step 2: After you have complained to your lawyer

Usually you should allow your lawyer at least eight weeks to resolve your complaint.

Once this time has passed and if your lawyer fails to deal with your complaint to your satisfaction, you can involve the Legal Ombudsman.

We ask that you come to us soon as you can and within six months of your last contact with your lawyer or law firm.

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Our help doesn't cover any disappointment you feel because you don't agree with the outcome of a court case.

If you are having difficulties contacting your lawyer and are not sure what to do next, please contact us on 0300 555 0333 (calls are charged at a local rate).

Our service is free for consumers.

Step 3: Involving the Legal Ombudsman

When you contact us to ask for our help, we will need you and your lawyer to provide information on the steps that have been taken to resolve the complaint before it reached us.

When you contact us, it will help if you have:

- the name and address of the lawyer
- the date you told the lawyer about your complaint
- details of the response you received.

Resolving complaints

If we agree that your lawyer's service has been unsatisfactory, we can ask the lawyer and the law firm to:

- apologise to you
- give back any documents you might need
- put things right if more work can correct what went wrong
- refund or reduce your legal fees, or
- pay compensation if you have lost out or been badly treated (up to £30,000).

Most complaints can be resolved informally. If needed, the Legal Ombudsman will carry out a formal investigation. As this could involve us getting more information from you and your lawyer, it could take longer to deal with.

Once accepted an Ombudsman's decision is final.

Involving other people or organisations

We prefer you to contact us directly. If you ask a friend or family member or anyone else, we will need to confirm they have your permission to talk to us. If you employ a representative such as a claims management company, you will have to pay their cost.

Our service is free.

How to contact us

If you want to know more about us and what we do, please visit us at www.legalombudsman.org.uk

To find out if we can help resolve your complaint, call us on 0300 555 0333 (calls are charged at a local rate and will be recorded) or email us at enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk

If you are calling from overseas,
please call +44 121 245 3050

For the minicom call 0300 555 1777

If you prefer, you can write to us at:

Legal Ombudsman

PO Box 15870

Birmingham

B30 9EB