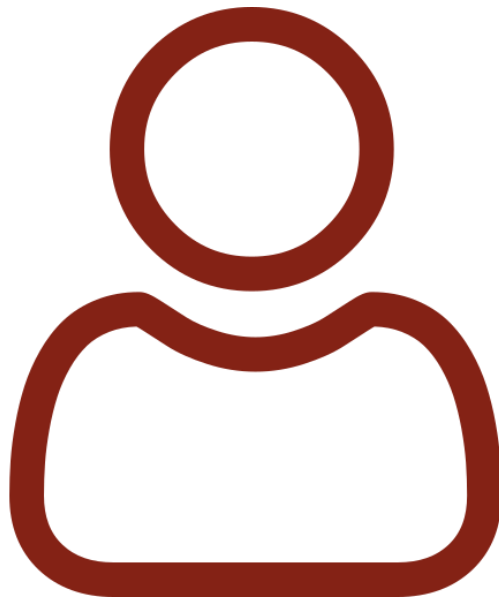


Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces (SCOAF)

Role and Powers



This factsheet explains the role and powers of SCOAF

SCOAF and the role of the Ombudsman were established under the Armed Forces Act 2006 (the Act). Part 14A of the Act gives the Ombudsman their powers.

1. What does the Ombudsman do?

The Ombudsman provides independent and impartial oversight of the Service Complaints system for members of the UK Armed Forces and has the power to:

- Help Service personnel access the Service Complaints system
- Investigate
- Report to Parliament

The Ombudsman's four key powers are set out in [section 4](#), below.

2. What is the Service Complaints system?

The Service Complaints system is an internal workplace grievance system for members of the UK Armed Forces. Personnel can make a Service Complaint if:

- They believe they were wronged in a matter relating to their Service life.
- The wrong happened while they were subject to Service law.

Service law began on 1 January 2008. Before then, personnel were subject to the laws of the individual Services, so Service Complaints cannot be made about matters that happened before 2008.

3. Who can use the Ombudsman?

- Anyone serving in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, who thinks they have been wronged in a matter relating to their Service, while they were subject to Service law; or
- Someone who has served in the Armed Forces (Regular or Reserve), who thinks they were wronged in a matter relating to their Service, and who was at the time of the wrong, subject to Service law.

4. The Ombudsman's four key powers

These are to:

- Help Service personnel access the Service Complaints system by making [referrals](#) for individuals who do not want to approach their Service's Secretariat directly to make their complaint.

- Review **admissibility** decisions made by the Services to not accept
 - a complaint (either in whole or in part); or
 - an appeal
 to determine whether that decision was correct.
- Investigate **undue delay** in the handling of a Service Complaint or Service Matter¹.
- Investigate the **substance** and/or handling of a complaint (**maladministration**) once the internal Service Complaints process is complete.

What is a referral?

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

What is admissibility?

This is a decision made by the single Service CAT whether to accept or exclude a complaint from the Service Complaints system. SCOAF has the power to review admissibility decisions and make a finding to either uphold or overturn the admissibility decision.

What is undue delay?

In general terms it means the complainant thinks the time taken to process their complaint has been unwarranted, excessive or unjust.

What is substance?

This is what the Service Complaint was about. SCOAF can investigate the substance of a complaint, but is not a further level of appeal.





What is maladministration?

It means that something was wrong or improper in the way the Service handled the complaint. SCOAF can investigate allegations of maladministration in the handling of Service Complaints.

¹ A Service Matter is any concern raised with the Service that could, potentially, be a Service Complaint, but a Service Complaint has not yet been admitted. This could mean an individual has made an informal complaint or submitted an Annex F/statement of complaint, but an admissibility decision has not yet been made.

5. Further information and contact details

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

-  0300 369 0689
Our enquiry line is open Monday-Friday 09:00-16:30
-  contact@scoaf.org.uk
-  www.scoaf.org.uk
-  @ SCOAF_UK

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

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

Policy, procedure and guidance for the Service Complaints process, including details of time limits for bringing complaints, are set out in [JSP 831 - Redress of Individual Grievances: Service Complaints](#).

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