

Complaints about the NIAO

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

The NIAO aims to carry out its work to the highest professional standards and to deliver an efficient and effective public audit service which represents best value for money. We are committed to continual improvement. This includes handling complaints carefully in an open and courteous way by investigating the matters raised thoroughly and replying as quickly as possible.

The NIAO has a three stage complaints process. We will do all we can to resolve your complaint at the first stage, but if you are not satisfied with our response or you are unhappy with the way we have handled your complaint, you can ask for your complaint to be reviewed. How to complain and details of our procedure are set out below along with how you can expect us to handle your complaint.

Informal Complaints

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

The Role of the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the responsibilities of the C&AG and the Local Government Auditor can be found at www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/about/role.asp.

Formal Complaints

What do we consider to be a complaint?

Any expression of dissatisfaction about the actions or inactions by the NIAO, or its staff, affecting one or more members of the public or an employee of a body audited by the NIAO will be considered by our complaints procedure. This includes the work of the local government auditor or any auditors appointed by the NIAO.

Who can complain?

Anyone who comes into contact with the NIAO and is unhappy or dissatisfied can complain. For example, you could be a member of the public or an employee of a body audited by the NIAO.

Who do I complain to?

There are two ways by which you can complain. You can:

- write to Director of Corporate Services, Northern Ireland Audit Office, 106 University Street, Belfast, BT7 1EU; or
- e-mail us at complaints@niauditoffice.gov.uk.

Is there a time limit for complaining?

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

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

If you wish to comment on the performance or behaviour of an organisation audited by the NIAO, you should raise it with that organisation, using its own complaints procedure.

Complaints that the NIAO has failed to meet its obligations to disclose information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and to deal with requests in accordance with statutory procedure are subject to a distinct formal process. If your complaint relates to **Freedom of Information**, please write to NIAO Information Manager, Northern Ireland Audit Office, 106 University Street, Belfast, BT7 1EU.

If a complaint is vexatious and/or repetitious, we may bring the communication to a close. We define vexatious as: a complaint instituted without sufficient grounds and serving only to cause annoyance to the receiver of the complaint; an oppressive complaint (with unjust severity); or otherwise an abuse of the procedures for dealing with complaints or conduct matters.

We define repetitive as: a complaint that is substantially the same as a previous complaint (whether made by or on behalf of the same or a different complainant); contains no fresh allegations which significantly affect the account of the previous complaint; or no fresh evidence, being evidence which was not reasonably available at the time the previous complaint was made, is tendered in support of it.

What happens to my complaint? (Stage One)

Once you have made a complaint to the Office in writing, we aim to send you an acknowledgement within five working days of receipt. That acknowledgement will provide an indication as to who will be responsible for responding to you and when you can expect to receive a reply. If we cannot investigate your complaint, we will write to you explaining why. If possible, we will suggest another organisation that may be able to help you if we cannot.

We will give serious consideration to the issues you raise. Where we identify mistakes in our approach we will acknowledge those and this may include providing an apology, setting out details of other steps we think are necessary in the circumstances, and explaining what we will do to prevent the problem occurring again.

We expect to respond to the majority of complaints within 20 working days of the complaint arriving with us. The time taken to respond will vary depending on the complexity of the complaint.

If we are unable to respond within 20 working days because, for example, the matters you raise require more detailed investigation, we will let you know.

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

We will make every effort to satisfactorily resolve your complaint in the first instance. However, if you are not satisfied by our response or by the way that your complaint was handled, you should contact the Director of Corporate Services (contact details below). The director will arrange for the case to be reconsidered by a member of staff who was not previously involved in handling your complaint. This stage will involve a full independent review of the handling of your complaint and all associated papers. The outcome of this

review will be communicated to you in writing.

**What can I do if I am still unsatisfied with the way my complaint has been handled?
(Stage Three)**

If you are unsatisfied by the outcome of the independent review you can request that the matter be referred to the C&AG who will consider whether:

- your complaint has been handled properly;
- our response was appropriate; and
- whether any further action is necessary.

You will be sent the outcome of this review into how your complaint was dealt with.

How to contact us

Email: complaints@niauditoffice.gov.uk

Write: Director of Corporate Services, Northern Ireland Audit Office,
106 University Street, Belfast, BT7 1EU

Further information on the work of the NIAO can be found at:

Web: www.niauditoffice.gov.uk