



Service First



S O C I A L
S E C U R I T Y
A G E N C Y

Customer charter



Social Security Agency - Customer charter

Welcome to our customer charter



Our job is to give you accurate information, advice and assistance on social security benefits and to provide

the RIGHT support

to the RIGHT people

at the RIGHT time

EVERY TIME!

We want you, our customer, and your representative, to judge us by the standard of service we set out in this charter.

We will treat you with respect and give you a fair service in line with current law, no matter what your religious belief, political opinion, race, age, marital status, sex, sexuality, whether you have a disability or whether you have any dependants.

We have enclosed our leaflet 'Your Guide To Our Services', which gives you details about the services we provide. Our leaflet 'Where To Find Us' tells you how you can contact us.

If you need any further information about this charter, call in to one of our offices. You can get this charter in Braille and on audio tape, if you ask.



We will give you information and advice about all the benefits that you may be entitled to claim, and we will assist you to fill in our forms and make a claim if you need us to. We will keep the information you give us confidential.

Whenever you contact us:

- in person;
- by phone;
- in writing;

the person you deal with will give you their name.

If you write with an enquiry, we aim to confirm that we have received your message within two working days and send you a reply within 10 working days. If we cannot answer you fully within 10 working days we will write to tell you why, and when you can expect our answer.



If you phone us on direct-dial numbers, we aim to answer your call within 20 seconds. If we cannot deal with your enquiry immediately, we will call you back. If we cannot help you the same day, we will explain why and tell you when you can expect our answer. You can phone us between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.



If we make a decision about your benefit claim, we will explain it in writing. If you do not understand our decision, please phone the office dealing with your claim or visit us and a member of our staff will explain it to you.



At our offices



When you first arrive at one of our offices, our staff will take you to the person you need to see. If you have an appointment, we aim to see you within 10 minutes of your appointment time. If you call in without an appointment, we aim to see you as quickly as we can - usually within 15 minutes. It may be more convenient for you to make an appointment than to call in.

All our offices are open from 9am until 4.30pm, Monday to Friday. They are closed on public holidays

and most bank holidays. Our offices will give you:

- privacy;
- a public phone;
- comfortable waiting areas;
- play areas for children; and
- toilets, as far as possible.



You will find our booklet 'Where To Find Us' in this pack, and it tells you where to find our offices. It also includes our addresses, phone numbers and contact names. You can find details about our services on our website at:

www.dsdni.gov.uk

If you are not able to call in to one of our offices, phone us and we may be able to arrange to visit you at your home. Our visiting officers will always carry identification (which you should ask to see), and they will give you information, advice and assistance on social security matters.





Dealing with your benefit claim



Once we have received your application form and any other information we need, we begin assessing your claim for benefit. We need to make sure that you are legally entitled to the benefit, and to decide how much benefit you should get.

We set ourselves targets to deal with your claim and pay your benefit. You can find out if we are meeting our targets each year in our annual reports. Each office also has information about its performance.



If we make a decision about your benefit and you think it is wrong, or you would like some further information about our decision, you can do the following.

- Ask us to explain our decision in more detail. Our letter telling you of our decision will also give you details on how you can have the decision explained more fully.
- You can ask us to look at our decision again, within one month of the date on the decision letter. The person who looks at the decision will usually be someone who has not previously been involved with your claim.



- You can also appeal to an independent tribunal if you think that our decision about your claim is wrong. You should appeal within one calendar month of our decision by filling in and signing the form contained in leaflet GL24 'If you think our decision is wrong'.



We will tell you about your rights each time we make a decision about your benefit.

You can get further information about how we make and review our decisions, and how you can appeal, in our leaflet GL24 'If you think our decision is wrong'. You can get this leaflet at any social security office.



Have we taken too long to process your claim?

Have your payments not arrived on time?

Has a member of our staff been impolite?

Has one of our staff made a mistake on your claim or in the advice they gave you?

Tell us about it, and we will put right any mistakes we have made.



We will follow up on all our customer complaints and if necessary, we will hold a full investigation. If we have made mistakes, we will use what we learn from them to help us improve our service.

If you want to make a complaint please write to, or phone, the person dealing with your benefit claim. Or, you can ask to be referred to a member of our management team in that office.

If you do not get a satisfactory reply from that office, you should write to:

**Mr Tommy O'Reilly
Lighthouse Building,
1 Cromac Place,
Gasworks BusinessPark,
Ormeau Road,
Belfast BT7 2JB.**



Unhappy with our service?

We aim to acknowledge all the complaints we receive within two working days, and we will normally send you a full reply within 10 working days. If your complaint takes us longer to investigate, we will write to you and tell you when you can expect a full reply from us.

If we have made a mistake on your claim that has caused you to lose money, we will consider making you a special payment. We will do this if your benefit was unacceptably delayed, or it was stopped for more than three months. You can get information in the 'Financial Redress for Maladministration Guide', which you will find in your local benefit office.

If you are not happy with the reply you get from us, you can have your complaint investigated independently by the Independent Case Examiner. You can write to:

The Independent Case Examiner

PO Box 1245

Belfast BT2 7DF.

Or, you can phone 0845 606 0777 (local call rate).

The Independent Case Examiner is not part of the Social Security Agency, and her services are free. If you want to find out more, ask for leaflet ICE 1 at your local benefit office.

You can also take your complaint to the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. The Ombudsman will normally expect you to ask a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) to contact them for you, and they will normally expect you to go through our complaint procedure first. For more information, phone 0800 343424 (freephone). Or, you can write to:

The Ombudsman

Freepost

Belfast BT1 6BR.

Or, you can call in at:

33 Wellington Place

Belfast BT1 6HN.

We will discuss our services with you



We are interested in your views about our services. We use the information you give us to make improvements.



You can see our annual report and accounts, and our business plan, at any of our offices or on our website.



If you have any questions or comments about this charter, please phone
028 9082 9152. Or, write to:

**Operations Directorate Support
1st Floor, Lighthouse Building,
1 Cromac Place,
Gasworks Business Park,
Ormeau Road,
Belfast BT7 2JB**



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