

**General Complaints Policy and Procedure**

Responsible Officer: Chief Executive

Author: Corporate Office

Date effective from: March 2001

Date last amended: December 2024

Next review date: December 2027

Introduction

1. This policy and procedure sets out how the National Institute for Health Care Excellence (NICE) will deal with general complaints about NICE.
2. It is designed to ensure proper consideration is given to each complaint in a way that is as fair and impartial as possible. All complaints will be handled by a senior member of NICE staff or member of the Board.

Principles

1. As a public body subject to review by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO), NICE follows the PHSO’s [principles of good complaint handling](https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/about-us/our-principles/principles-good-complaint-handling), which means we are committed to:

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

1. With all complaints we will:

* listen carefully to your concerns
* be polite and helpful
* deal with your complaint fairly and efficiently
* admit any mistakes we have made, put matters right whenever possible and learn from the investigation

try to help you find the right organisation if we cannot deal with the complaint ourselves.

Scope

1. This policy focuses on circumstances where you think we have acted unreasonably in our relationship with you.
2. It cannot be used to make complaints about the recommendations or advice contained in NICE’s individual publications, or the methods and processes used in their development. We recognise that people may not always agree with our advice. We understand and accept this. The methods and processes we use provide the opportunity for anyone who is unhappy with the recommendations and advice we publish to put their concerns to us. Those methods and processes are themselves subject to periodic review and public consultation. Concerns, comments and queries about our guidance and advice should be submitted to the enquiry handling team ([nice@nice.org.uk](mailto:nice@nice.org.uk)) who will coordinate a response.
3. This policy also does not cover complaints relating to

* the Freedom of Information Act
* the Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations
* NICE’s compliance with current data protection legislation and concerns raised about the organisation’s possible failure to uphold a data subject's rights as specified in the UK GDPR, or
* Employment issues including allegations of potential misconduct by individual staff

for which we have separate policies and procedures.

1. You should make your complaint as soon as you can. We are unable to investigate complaints about events that occurred or came to your attention more than 12 months ago. If there are good reasons for not having made the complaint inside this time limit, and it is still possible to investigate the complaint effectively and fairly, we may decide to still consider your complaint.

Making a complaint

1. Whenever possible it’s best to try and resolve a complaint by talking to the relevant team informally. However, if you are unable to resolve it in this way, you can make a formal complaint.
2. To make a formal complaint you should write (letter or e-mail) to us setting out your concerns as clearly as you can. Providing any relevant supporting information at this stage can help us make as quick a response as possible.
3. You might not want your identity known to those to whom we will need to talk to investigate your complaint. If so, please let us know at the start.
4. If you decide not to tell us who you are, we will investigate your complaint but we will be unable to provide you with a response.
5. Your complaint should be sent to:

David Coombs

Associate Director, Corporate Office

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

2nd Floor, 2 Redman Place

London

E20 1JQ

Email: [complaints@nice.org.uk](mailto:complaints@nice.org.uk)

1. If there are extenuating circumstances that mean you are unable to put your concerns in writing, you can ask for a meeting (or telephone call) with the Associate Director, Corporate Office, who will make a record of the complaint for you.
2. If you are making a complaint on behalf of someone else, we will ask for information to confirm you have authority to act on the other person's behalf.

Role of the Corporate Office

1. The Corporate Office at NICE has overall responsibility for the complaints process. This involves ensuring:

* the complaint progresses through each stage in accordance with the procedure
* that reasonable efforts are made to ensure that your complaint is resolved as quickly as possible

that a record is kept of the way your complaint has been handled.

1. To ensure accurate monitoring, all our correspondence with you will be dealt with through the Corporate Office.

How we will deal with complaints

**Stage 1**

1. The Associate Director, Corporate Office will make an initial judgement on whether your complaint falls within the remit of the complaints policy. If the complaint would best be considered by a different NICE process, we will let you know.
2. You will be sent an acknowledgement of the complaint. This will usually be within 5 working days, but may be longer if consideration is required as to whether what you tell us falls within the complaints policy. We may ask you for more information if we are unsure about what you’ve told us. If we do ask you for more information but we don’t hear from you within 20 working days, the case will be closed.
3. Once we have all the information we need, the Associate Director, Corporate Office, will investigate your complaint and will send you a full reply as soon as possible, usually within 20 working days. This investigation and response may be delegated to another senior member of staff depending on the nature of your complaint.
4. If we are unable to respond within the 20 working days period, we will let you know why and how long we think it will take.
5. Where appropriate, the response will include a suitable apology, an offer to put things right, and lessons that have been learnt and/or steps that will be taken to prevent similar issues occurring again.
6. We hope that you will be happy with our response, but if you’re not, you can take your complaint to the next stage (stage 2), as long as you do so within 20 working days of receiving our response.

**Stage 2: Review by Chief Executive, senior manager, or Non-Executive Director panel**

1. A stage 2 complaint will be logged by the Corporate Office and forwarded to the Chief Executive.
2. The Chief Executive will then choose one of the following options to complete the stage 2 review:

* Undertake the review personally;
* Ask another senior manager to do so on their behalf;
* Convene a panel of two of NICE’s non-executive directors (members of our Board who are not employees).

1. The Chief Executive will take account of the nature and complexity of the complaint when deciding who will undertake the stage 2 review. Considerations include the seniority of the staff about whom you have complained, whether or not the stage 1 investigation was undertaken by a director, and the potential for the complaint to escalate to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.
2. Stage 2 complaints will be acknowledged in writing within 5 working days of receipt. We will send you a written reply as soon as possible and normally within 20 working days of the receipt of the stage 2 complaint, giving a full response to the issues raised.
3. If a full response is not possible within 20 working days, we will let you know as soon as possible and we will give you an anticipated response date.
4. When we reply we will let you know that this is the final stage of the internal complaints procedure and that if you are dissatisfied with the outcome that you can apply for a review of your case by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. This must be done through your local MP (this is a legal requirement).
5. The [Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman](https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/) can be contacted at:

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

Millbank Tower

Millbank

London

SW1P 4QP

Helpline: 0345 015 4033

Email: [phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk)

Complaints about the Executive Team and Board

1. The Associate Director, Corporate Office will not review complaints about members of the Executive Team and NICE Board, and different arrangements apply:

* the Chief Executive will respond to any complaints about members of the Executive Team
* the NICE Chairman will respond to any complaints about the Chief Executive

NICE’s Senior Independent Director (who is a non-executive director) will respond to any complaints about the NICE Chairman.

1. The response from the Chief Executive, Chairman or Senior Independent Director will be final. Given the level of seniority of the initial respondent, the arrangements for a stage 2 investigation outlined above will not apply. If you remain unhappy with the outcome of the complaint investigation, you can refer your concerns to The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (via your MP).
2. All other aspects of the complaints process outlined in paragraphs 18 to 22 above, including timescales, will apply.

Persistent or unreasonable complaints

1. Malicious, vexatious or unreasonable complaints or behaviour, which includes communications using threatening and/or abusive language, will be managed in line with the procedures laid out in the policy on managing unreasonable or persistent enquirer contact.

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

1. The Corporate Office maintains a record of all complaints so that we are able to monitor the number and frequency of complaints, to help see if there any trends in the number and nature of the complaints received over time and how they have been dealt with, including any lessons learnt.
2. This information will be reviewed annually by the Auditand Risk Assurance Committee.

# Appendix - Version Control Sheet

**Version Date Author Replaces Comment**

2.1 December 2012 Julian Lewis Complaints policy V2.0 -

2.2 November 2015 David Coombs Complaints policy V2.1 -

3.0 September 2018 Elaine Repton Complaints policy v2.2 -

3.1 December 2019 David Coombs Complaints policy v3.0 Minor amendments to paragraphs 7 and 26

3.2 December 2021 David Coombs Complaints policy v3.1 Minor amendments to paragraphs 4 and 5,

and updates to  
terminology

3.3 December 2024 David Coombs Complaints policy v3.2 Minor amendments following periodic review