



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## **COMPLAINTS POLICY REPORT 2020-21**

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## Section 1 – Background to the Complaints Policy

- 1.1 The Assembly Commission, in common with other public bodies, provides a method for members of the public to make a complaint about Assembly Commission staff, services and/or perceived failures in complying with the Assembly Commission’s Equality Scheme.
- 1.2 The Complaints Policy, which is published on the Assembly website, lists the type of complaints that may be made. These are:
- Our failure to provide a service;
  - Inadequate standard of service;
  - Assembly Commission policies; and
  - Treatment by or attitude of a member of Assembly Commission staff.

The Policy also makes clear the issues that will not be considered under it. These are:

- Decisions of the Northern Ireland Assembly;
- MLAs or their staff;
- Executive Ministers;
- Executive Departmental policy; or
- The merits of decisions taken by the Assembly Commission acting within its legal powers.

## Section 2 – Complaints received by the Northern Ireland Assembly

- 2.1 For the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 there were two admissible complaints. A summary of the investigation and response in respect of each complaint is set out in the following table.

Date	Complaint	Action	Date Resolved
17/6/2020	Complaint that there had been an excessive delay by the Assembly Commission in processing a pension-related matter.	The complaint was investigated by a senior member of staff unconnected with the matter. The investigation concluded that the time taken to process the pension-related matter was excessive, due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the complexity of the matter,</li> <li>• staffing pressures resulting from the resumption of normal Assembly business; and</li> <li>• the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> </ul> The complaint was upheld and the complainant received an apology.	Response sent on 20/7/2020

Date	Complaint	Action	Date Resolved
24/9/2020	The complainant appealed the outcome of the investigation and its findings.	A review of the complaint investigation and its outcome was undertaken by the Director of Parliamentary Services. This review again concluded that the time taken to process the complainant's pensions-related matter was excessive. The review noted that there had been no financial detriment as a result of the delay. Again, the complaint was upheld.	22/10/2020
21/10/2020	Complaint that the Assembly Commission had introduced procedures within its Recruitment and Selection Framework that were likely to be discriminatory.	The complaint was investigated by a senior member of staff unconnected with the matter. The investigation concluded that the Assembly Commission's Recruitment and Selection Framework had not introduced procedures that were likely to be discriminatory. The complaint was not upheld.	Response sent on 27/11/2020.
30/11/2020	The complainant appealed the outcome of the investigation and its findings.	The Clerk/Chief Executive responded to the complainant, seeking clarification as to whether their correspondence was to be treated as an appeal under the Assembly Commission's Complaints Policy, or as a perceived failure to comply with the Commission's Equality Scheme.	10/12/2020
16/12/2020	The complainant requested that complaint should be dealt with under the Equality Scheme.	Details of the complaint were forward to the Assembly Commission's Equality Manager. Policy. Following an investigation into the complaint by the Equality Manager, the complaint was not upheld.	8/2/2021

### Section 3 – Conclusions

- 3.1 The fact that there were only two admissible complaints during the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 pays tribute to the efforts of the Assembly Commission in ensuring that its staff delivers services in a timely, fair and transparent manner.
- 3.2 The Assembly Commission continues to endeavour to provide high quality and professional services for the public and minimise the number of complaints received.

3.3 As highlighted in this report, one complaint was upheld. This complaint arose primarily as a result of the complex interplay of three factors, two of which were highly unusual - staffing pressures resulting from the resumption of normal Assembly business; and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst the complaint was upheld, it would not be envisaged that staffing pressures resulting from the resumption of normal Assembly business and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic would occur that would similarly affect any future consideration of similar complex pension-related matters.