



Independent  
Complaints  
and Grievance  
Scheme

# Making a Complaint, a Guide for Complainants

This is a brief guide to the Independent  
Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS).

[parliament.uk](https://www.parliament.uk)

Edition 2021

# Using the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS): Guide for Complainants

**This guide is to help you find support if you feel you have experienced bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct. It will also explain how you can make a complaint and what you can expect to happen throughout the complaints process.**

The Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme is Parliament's independent mechanism for handling complaints of bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct. This guide provides a step-by-step breakdown of how the complaints process works, and what you can expect at each step. We encourage you to contact the ICGS Helpline (details below) to discuss your experiences with an independent, confidential advisor.

The ICGS provides advice and support to all members of the parliamentary community, whether you choose to make a formal complaint or not.

**This guidance is broken down into several sections.**

- 1 The Behaviour Code**
- 2 Getting support and advice**
- 3 Making a formal complaint**
- 4 Useful links and further information**

This guidance was last updated in July 2021

# 1

## The Behaviour Code

The Behaviour Code sets out how all of us who work in Parliament should be treated and how we should treat others. The Code, the Bullying and Harassment policy and procedure and the Sexual Misconduct policy and procedure, work together as part of the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme to provide a framework to create a respectful working environment and to respond to any complaints of unacceptable behaviour promptly, fairly and effectively.

## Behaviour Code

Whether you are a visitor or working in Parliament at Westminster or elsewhere, there are clear guidelines on how you should be treated, and how you should treat others:

- **Respect** and value everyone—bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct are not tolerated
- **Recognise** your power, influence or authority and don't abuse them
- **Think** about how your behaviour affects others and strive to understand their perspective
- **Act** professionally towards others
- **Ensure** Parliament meets the highest ethical standards of integrity, courtesy and mutual respect
- **Speak up** about any unacceptable behaviour you see

Unacceptable behaviour will be dealt with seriously, independently and with effective sanctions

## What is Bullying?

Bullying may be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour involving an abuse or misuse of power that can make a person feel vulnerable, upset, undermined, humiliated, denigrated or threatened. Power does not always mean being in a position of authority and can include both personal strength and the power to coerce through fear or intimidation.

## What is Harassment?

Harassment is any unwanted conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them.

## What is Sexual Misconduct?

Sexual misconduct describes a range of behaviours including sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, voyeurism and any other conduct of a sexual nature that is non-consensual or has the purpose or effect of threatening, intimidating, undermining, humiliating or coercing a person.

More examples of Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct can be found in the policies:

- [Bullying and Harassment Policy](#)
- [Sexual Misconduct Policy](#)

If you're unsure if the behaviour you are experiencing is Bullying, Harassment or Sexual Misconduct, we always recommend contacting the ICGS Helpline for support.

# 2

## Getting advice and support

The ICGS helpline provides advice, support and signposting about incidents of bullying, harassment, or sexual misconduct on the Parliamentary Estate, in constituency offices or while undertaking parliamentary work. Any member of the Parliamentary community can contact the helpline, particularly anyone looking to make a complaint, anyone who has a complaint made about them, witnesses, or anyone providing support to another colleague. You may remain anonymous when contacting the helpline, and only when making a formal complaint will you need to provide your name.

A trained Independent Sexual Misconduct Advisor (ISMA) is available to provide personal support anyone contacting the Helpline about their experience of sexual misconduct. The ISMA can support you throughout the complaints process.

ICGS Helpline Telephone Number  
**0808 168 9281**

Text Relay  
**18001 0808 168 9281**

Email Address  
**support@icgshelpline.org.uk**

**Opening Hours 9am–6pm Monday to Friday. Outside of these hours you can leave a message and your call will be returned the next working day. Other sources of support are available. Contact the ICGS helpline find out what further support is available to you. Your support could include:**

- The Employee Assistance Programme – 0800 030 5182, or [healthassuredeap.co.uk](http://healthassuredeap.co.uk) (username House, password: Parliament)
- Your line manager
- Trade Unions in the House of Commons and Parliamentary Digital Service
- Trade Unions in the House of Lords
- Trade Unions for Members' staff
- The Workplace Equality Networks (WENs)
- MAPSA (the organisation for Members' and Peers' staff)
- House of Lords HR service
- House of Commons HR service
- PDS HR Support
- Parliamentary Health and Wellbeing Service
- Mental Health First Aiders
- The Guardians
- Voice Champions

# 3

## Making a Complaint

This section outlines what will happen if you make a formal complaint. There are six parts to this section, depending on who is being complained about. Please navigate to the section which is most appropriate to your complaint. The sections are as follows;

I would like to complain about House of Commons, PDS, or House of Lords staff

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I would like to complain about an MP or former MP

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## I would like to complain about House of Commons, PDS or House of Lords staff



### Step 1

The helpline will ask you about your complaint and will capture the main details of it. This information will be passed to the ICGS team who will allocate an independent investigator to investigate the complaint. We encourage you to let your manager, HR service, party whips or another trusted individual (e.g. your trade union representative) know in confidence that you are involved in an ICGS complaint. They can discuss any actions to support you during and after an investigation (e.g. temporary changes to working practices, hours, accompaniment during to ICGS meetings during working hours).



### Step 2

The investigator will contact you to discuss the details of your complaint. This will include an initial assessment to establish whether your complaint can be considered under the ICGS and can progress to a formal investigation (Steps 3 & 4). You will be asked to provide the names of any witnesses. The investigator will ask you what you would like to achieve at the end of the process and explore with you whether an informal resolution might be appropriate.



### Step 3

If the complaint proceeds to a formal assessment, the investigator will discuss any additional information with you, including any evidence you may have, such as emails or notes relevant to the complaint. The investigator will interview the person who the complaint is about (the respondent) and any witnesses. After reviewing all the evidence, the investigator will write a draft report. A copy of the draft report will be sent to you and the respondent. This is an opportunity for both the complainant and the respondent to check that facts and dates are correct, to request corrections, to raise concerns if evidence has not been considered or witnesses have not been interviewed, or to raise other concerns about the process of the investigation.



### Step 4

The investigator will produce a final report detailing their findings and stating whether the complaint should be upheld or not upheld. You, the respondent, and the Decision-Making Body, will all receive copies of the report. There are several options that can be considered by the Decision-Making Body.

If you would like to complain about House of Commons, PDS, or House of Lords staff, the decision-making body will be a senior HR representative in:

- People and Culture (Commons)
- Human Resources (Lords)
- Human Resources (PDS)

## I would like to complain about an MP or former MP

If you would like to complain about an MP, the decision-making body will be the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards (PCS), Kathryn Stone.



### Step 1

The helpline will ask you about your complaint and will capture the main details of it. This information will be passed to the ICGS team who will allocate the complaint to an independent investigator. You can let your party whip (if you are an MP), trade union representative or trusted person know you are involved in an ICGS complaint. You must inform them that the process is confidential, and they must not share any information about your complaint with anyone else. They can discuss any actions to support you during and after an investigation (e.g. temporary changes to working practices, hours, accompaniment to ICGS meetings during working hours).



### Step 2

The investigator will contact you to take initial details of your complaint and will then draft an initial assessment to establish whether your complaint can be resolved informally, can be considered under the ICGS and can progress to formal investigation (Steps 3 & 4). You will be asked to provide the names of any witnesses. The investigator will ask you what you would like to achieve at the end of the process. The initial assessment is sent to the PCS, who will review the investigator's recommendation. This initial assessment will be shared with the person you have complained about (the respondent), if the PCS decides that your complaint should proceed to formal investigation. She will oversee the investigation process from that point.



### Step 3

If the complaint proceeds to a formal assessment, the investigator will interview you and discuss any additional information with you, including any evidence you may have, such as emails or notes relevant to the complaint. The investigator will also interview the respondent and any witnesses. The investigator will produce a draft full assessment report and send it to the PCS together with their recommendation as to whether the complaint should be upheld.



### Step 4

The PCS will then read all the evidence and check that it is fairly and fully reflected in the report, that relevant evidence has been included and irrelevant evidence has not been relied on. The PCS will send both you and the respondent a copy of the draft formal assessment report to check that facts and dates are correct, to request any corrections, to raise concerns if relevant evidence has not been considered or relevant witnesses not interviewed or raise other concerns about the process of the investigation. The PCS will then decide whether or not the complaint is upheld and will write to you and to the respondent to let you know about her decision. The PCS will decide what needs to happen if your complaint is upheld. For example, she can ask the respondent to complete some training or to apologise to you. If the PCS thinks





#### Step 4 continued

the complaint needs a more serious sanction than she can impose, she will send your complaint to the Independent Expert Panel (IEP). In serious cases, the IEP can recommend suspension or expulsion from the House. Both you and the respondent can also appeal against the PCS's decision to the IEP. For more information on the IEP go to its webpage or contact the ICGS team.

The Independent Expert Panel determines appeals and sanctions in cases where complaints have been brought against MPs of bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct under the ICGS.

The panel is entirely independent, with no MPs taking part in its decisions.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact: [independentexpertpanel@parliament.uk](mailto:independentexpertpanel@parliament.uk)

## I would like to complain about someone who works for an MP

If you would like to complain about someone who works for an MP, the decision-making body will be the line manager, who is usually the MP.



### Step 1

The helpline will ask you about your complaint and will capture the main details of it. This information will be passed to the ICGS team who will allocate the complaint to an independent investigator. You can let your line manager, HR service, party whip, trade union or another trusted individual know in confidence that you are involved in an ICGS complaint. They can discuss any actions to support you during and after an investigation (e.g. temporary changes to working practices, hours, accompaniment to ICGS meetings during working hours).



### Step 2

The investigator will contact you to discuss the details of your complaint. This will include an initial assessment to establish whether your complaint can be considered under the ICGS and can progress to a formal investigation (Steps 3 & 4). You will be asked to provide the names of any witnesses. The investigator will also ask you what you would like to achieve at the end of the process and explore with you whether an informal resolution might be appropriate.



### Step 3

If the complaint proceeds to a formal assessment, the investigator will discuss any additional information with you, including any evidence you may have, such as emails, or notes relevant to the complaint. The investigator will interview person being complained about (the respondent) and any witnesses. After reviewing all the evidence, the investigator will produce a draft report, a copy of which will be sent to you and the respondent. This is an opportunity for both parties to check that facts and dates are correct and request corrections, to raise concerns if relevant evidence has not been considered or relevant witnesses not interviewed, or to raise other concerns about the process of the investigation.



### Step 4

The investigator will produce a final report detailing their findings and whether the complaint should be upheld. You, the respondent, and the decision-making body will all receive copies of the report. If a complaint is upheld, the MP, as the employer, will be notified, and should take appropriate action.

## I would like to complain about a Member of the House of Lords or former Member of the House of Lords

If you would like to complain about a Member of the House of Lords, the decision-making body will be one of the Lords Commissioners for Standards, either Akbar Khan or Martin Jelley.



### Step 1

The helpline will ask you about your complaint and will capture the main details of it. This information will be passed to the office of the independent House of Lords Commissioners for Standards, who are responsible for looking into complaints about Members of the House of Lords. You can also choose to complain directly to the House of Lords Commissioners, Akbar Khan or Martin Jelley, via [lordsstandards@parliament.uk](mailto:lordsstandards@parliament.uk). Your complaint will be handled by one of the Commissioners. You can let your line manager, party whip, trade union or another trusted individual person know in confidence that you are involved in an ICGS complaint. They can discuss any actions to support you during and after an investigation (e.g. temporary changes to working practices, hours, accompaniment to ICGS meetings during working hours).



### Step 2

The Commissioner will complete a preliminary assessment to decide whether your complaint should go forward to a full investigation. This will establish whether your complaint can be considered under the Code of Conduct and the details of your complaint, including the names of any witnesses. He will ask you what you would like to achieve at the end of the process and explore with you whether an informal resolution might be appropriate. At both the preliminary assessment (Step 2) and investigation stages (Steps 3 & 4), the Commissioner may be supported by an independent investigator.



### Step 3

The Commissioner will talk to you about your complaint and ask for any additional evidence you may have e.g. emails or notes you may have taken in relation to your complaint. He may ask to meet you. He will speak to the member being complained about (the respondent) and any witnesses necessary to complete the investigation. After reviewing all the evidence, the Commissioner will produce a draft factual report, and a copy will be sent to you and the respondent. This is an opportunity for both parties to check that facts and dates are correct and request corrections, to raise concerns if relevant evidence has not been considered or relevant witnesses not interviewed, or to raise other concerns about the process of the investigation.



### Step 4

The Commissioner will then decide whether the complaint should be upheld. He will write to you and to the respondent to inform you about his decision.

#### There are four possible outcomes of an investigation:

- 1. Complaint dismissed:** after investigation the Commissioner finds the complaint is not upheld. The complainant may appeal this finding to the Conduct Committee:
- 2. Agreed resolution:** during the investigation and before any findings are made, the Commissioner agrees a way to resolve the complaint with the complainant and respondent;

## Step 4 continued

- 3. Remedial action:** after investigation the Commissioner finds the complaint is upheld and agrees further action with the respondent and the complainant, including an apology or training.
- 4. Sanction:** after investigation the Commissioner finds the complaint is upheld but remedial action cannot be agreed or would be inappropriate. He reports his findings, with a recommended sanction, to the Conduct Committee which hears any appeal. After this the Committee reports to the House.

If the complaint is upheld, the respondent may be asked to agree to remedial action as an appropriate outcome, in which case a report will be produced and published on the parliamentary website. In cases where the Committee reports to the House, the report will be decided by the House of Lords without debate. Possible sanctions include, an apology, undertaking training, suspension, or expulsion from the House.

The Conduct Committee is made up of five members of the House and four lay members who have relevant professional experience. In addition to considering the Commissioner for Standards' recommended sanction when this is not remedial action, the Conduct Committee is responsible for hearing appeals against the Commissioners for Standards' findings.

If you have any queries about the work of the Conduct Committee, please contact [lordsconduct@parliament.uk](mailto:lordsconduct@parliament.uk)

## I would like to complain about someone who works for a Member of the House of Lords

If you would like to complain about someone who works for a Member of the House of Lords, the decision-making body will be one of the Lords Commissioners for Standards, either Akbar Khan or Martin Jelley.



### Step 1

The helpline will ask you about your complaint and will capture the main details of it. This information will be passed to the office of the independent House of Lords Commissioners – Martin Jelley and Akbar Khan. You can also choose to complain directly to the House of Lords Commissioners via [lordsstandards@parliament.uk](mailto:lordsstandards@parliament.uk). Your complaint will be handled by one of the Commissioners. You can let your line manager, HR service, party whip, trade union or another trusted individual know in confidence that you are involved in an ICGS complaint. They can discuss any actions to support you during and after an investigation (e.g. temporary changes to working practices, hours, accompaniment to ICGS meetings during working hours).



### Step 2

The Commissioner will complete a preliminary assessment to decide whether your complaint should go forward to a full investigation (Steps 3 & 4). This will include an assessment to establish whether your complaint can be considered under the Code of Conduct, the details of your complaint, including the names of any witnesses. He will ask you what you would like to achieve at the end of the process and explore with you whether an informal resolution might be appropriate. At both the preliminary assessment (Step 2) and investigation stages (Steps 3 & 4), the Commissioner may be supported by an independent investigator.



### Step 3

The Commissioner will talk to you about your complaint and ask for any additional evidence you may have e.g. emails or notes you may have taken in relation to your complaint. He may ask to meet with you. He will speak to the person being complained about (the respondent) and any witnesses. After reviewing all the evidence, the Commissioner will produce a draft factual report, a copy of which will be sent to you and the respondent. This is an opportunity for both parties to check that facts and dates are correct, to request corrections, to raise concerns if relevant evidence has not been considered or relevant witnesses not interviewed, or to raise other concerns about the process of the investigation.



### Step 4

The Commissioner will then decide whether the complaint should be upheld. He will write to you and to the respondent to inform you about his decision.

#### There are four possible outcomes of an investigation:

- 1. Complaint dismissed:** after investigation the Commissioner finds the complaint is not upheld. The complainant may appeal this finding to the Conduct Committee.
- 2. Agreed resolution:** during the investigation and before findings are made, the Commissioner agrees a resolution with the complainant and respondent;



## Step 4 continued

3. **Remedial action:** after investigation the Commissioner finds the complaint is upheld and agrees further action with the respondent and the complainant, including an apology or training.

4. **Sanction:** after investigation the Commissioner the complaint is upheld but remedial action cannot be agreed or would be inappropriate. He reports the findings, with a recommended sanction, to the Conduct Committee which hears any appeal.

When a complaint is upheld: In some cases, the Lords Commissioner for Standards will agree remedial action with the member and the complainant, and his report will not be considered by the Conduct Committee.

Where remedial action is not appropriate, the Conduct Committee will consider the Commissioner's report and his recommended sanction, as well as any appeals. Following this, the Committee may report to the House.

Possible sanctions include suspension or withdrawal of the individual's pass, or cancellation of the individual's e-mail account.

## I would like to complain about another passholder

If you would like to complain about another passholder, the decision-making body will be usually be the employer of the person you are complaining about.



### Step 1

The helpline will ask you about your complaint and will capture the main details of it. This information will be passed to the ICGS team who will allocate the complaint to an independent investigator. You can let your line manager, HR service, trade union or another trusted individual know in confidence that you are involved in an ICGS complaint. They can discuss any actions to support you during and after an investigation (e.g. temporary changes to working practices, hours, accompaniment to ICGS meetings during working hours).



### Step 2

The investigator will contact you to discuss the details of your complaint. This will include an initial assessment to establish whether your complaint can be considered under the ICGS and can progress to formal investigation (Steps 3 & 4). You will be asked to provide the names of any witnesses. The investigator will ask you what you would like to achieve at the end of the process and explore with you whether an informal resolution might be appropriate.



### Step 3

If the complaint proceeds to a formal assessment, the investigator will discuss any additional information with you, including any evidence you may have such as emails or notes relevant to the complaint. The investigator will interview the person who the complaint is about (the respondent) and speak to any witnesses. After reviewing all the evidence, the investigator will produce a draft report, a copy of which will be sent to you and the respondent. This is an opportunity for both parties to check that facts and dates are correct and request corrections, to raise concerns if relevant evidence has not been considered or relevant witnesses not interviewed, or to raise other concerns about the process of the investigation.



### Step 4

The investigator will produce a final report detailing their findings and saying whether the complaint should be upheld. You and the respondent will receive copies of the Report. If the complaint is upheld, the decision-making body of the respondent will also receive a copy of the report.

If the complaint is upheld, next steps will be decided on a case-by-case basis.



# 4

## Useful Links

### Please visit

- [Employee Assistance Programme](#)
- [Lords Improving our Workplace hub](#)
- [Commons Culture Hub](#)
- [PDS Culture Hub](#)
- [Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards](#)
- [House of Lords Commissioner for Standards](#)
- [House of Lords Conduct Committee](#)
- [Members Services Team SharePoint Site](#)
- [ICGS internet site](#)
- [Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policies and Procedures](#)
- [ICGS Hub](#)
- [Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policies and Procedures](#)

