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Complaints handling - Identity and Passport Service policy

A formal complaints system was introduced in 1994 and since that time it has concentrated on establishing best practice and aiming for uniformity of approach. For any complaints system to work effectively it is imperative that staff should endeavour to resolve problems when they arise rather than encouraging customers to use the formal complaints procedures to achieve a solution to the problem.

IPS is committed to the Government’s belief that proper handling of complaints is central to the programme of modernising and improving public services. The White Paper ‘Your Right to Know’, published in December 1997, included a duty on all public services to publish their complaints procedures. IPS sets out this procedure in the guidance notes which accompany our application packs. This policy also applies to customer complaints relating to IPS provision of the Passport Validation Service (PVS) and Card Validation Service (CVS).

All organisations want to provide good services, but sometimes things go wrong. What is fundamental then is how people and their complaints are handled, and how we learn from the experience. Complaints should not be seen as the responsibility of Customer Service sections only. Everyone in IPS needs to contribute to:

- Handling them effectively;
- Learning the lessons from them;
- Improving performance;
- Providing information to the customer on how we have improved our service based on feedback.

What people expect

Research carried out on what factors are considered most important when an organisation is dealing with a complaint were found that to be; ranked in order of importance:-

- Speed with which they respond;
- Keeping you informed about what is going on;
- Knowing they will deal with it fairly;
- How friendly and helpful they are;
- Knowing the name of the person dealing with your complaint;
- Receiving a written apology if they made a mistake;
- Receiving a written explanation;
- Having a clear procedure for dealing with complaints;
- Having senior staff investigate your complaint;
- Receiving compensation.
This is confirmed by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman guidance on the ‘Principles of Good Complaint Handling’ which was published on the 10 February 2009, and states:-

- Everyone has the right to expect a good service from public bodies and to have things put right if they go wrong. When things do go wrong, public bodies should manage complaints properly so customers’ concerns are dealt with appropriately;
- Good complaint handling matters because it is an important way of ensuring customers receive the service they are entitled to expect. Complaints are a valuable source of feedback for the public body; they provide an audit trail and can be an early warning of failures in service delivery. When handled well, complaints provide an opportunity for public bodies to improve their service and reputation;
- Good complaint handling should be led from the top, focused on outcomes, fair and proportionate, and sensitive to complainants’ needs.

Compensation is included however, the ‘Ombudsman’s Principles for Remedy’ states:-

- Not all maladministration or poor service results in injustice or hardship, but where it does, our underlying principle is to ensure that the public body restores the complainant to the position they would have been in if the maladministration or poor service had not occurred. If that is not possible, the public body should compensate them appropriately;
- There is a range of appropriate responses to a complaint that has been upheld. These will include both financial and non-financial remedies. Financial compensation will not be appropriate in every case, but public bodies should not rule it out as a form of remedy for justified complaints. We understand that, for public bodies, there is often a balance between responding appropriately to people’s complaints and acting proportionately within available resources. However, finite resources should not be used as an excuse for failing to provide a fair remedy.

Although most customers are initially not concerned with financial redress this becomes more of an issue if the complaint is not dealt with effectively at this initial point. Also a number of complaints that IPS deals with will have resulted in actual financial loss, such as a lost holiday, and so claims for compensation can be expected.

**Definition of a Complaint**

At times staff are uncertain about what constitutes a complaint. Differing returns indicate that logging something as a complaint varies across offices, particularly in terms of recording telephone and counter complaints. The Cabinet Office’s former Service First team gave a useful working definition of a complaint as “any expression of dissatisfaction that needs a response”. This definition needs to be applied across all IPS services. The Cabinet Office also
emphasise that if the person contacting you thinks it is a complaint then it is, whatever you think about the merits of it. A complaint may be about service delivery or policy. The large majority of complaints received by IPS relate to service delivery, but a number relating to policy are also received – e.g. free concessionary passports for applicants born on or before 2 September 1929 – and these should also be recorded.

In all cases complaints should be viewed as an opportunity to improve our service to customers and our commitment to Customer Service Excellence.

Complaints made at one of IPS’s public office locations, even if resolved at the time, should, nevertheless, be recorded. Customers should be given a 'Customer Feedback' form for completion and this should be sent to the Central Customer Service Team for recording even though no further action may be required.

A ‘Customer Feedback’ form should always be available to customers at all IPS public office locations.

IPS will not normally accept complaints where there has been a delay of more than 12 months between the complainant becoming aware of the relevant facts and submitting their case to IPS. Complaints after this date will not usually be considered, but IPS retain discretion to consider those where there is good reason for the delay or where the issues raised are so serious as to override the time factor. This message is made clear in the ‘How to fill in your application form’ booklet within the passport application pack.

**Complaints from Customers of Other Government Departments**

Complaints from Customers who attend interviews carried out on our premises on behalf of an Other Government Department (OGD) should be handled by the Other Government Department (OGD) customer services in accordance with their Business As Usual.

Any complaints about how customers were treated by IPS staff in our offices will fall to Central Customer Service Team to handle in the normal way.

Any complaint from IPS customers regarding being treated differently from Other Government Department (OGD) customers on our sites should be addressed in the following manner.

“'The Identity and Passport Service (IPS) are conducting interviews on behalf of (name of OGD); these interviews are conducted using the (name of OGD) criteria for their interviews which differ slightly from the IPS criteria. Each interview will be conducted using the appropriate procedure relevant to the service required.’

**Partnership Complaints**
On receipt of a complaint in relation to our partnership arrangements, the complaint needs to be assessed and a decision made as to whether it needs a reply from IPS or the Partner.

Complaints will normally fall into one of two categories:-

- comments about the operation or policy relating to the partnership arrangements,
- comments about the partner’s level of service or the manner or behaviour of the partner’s member of staff when processing the application.

If the complaint falls in the first category and can be dealt with by IPS then the complaint should be dealt with under the normal procedures. If however, the complainant also refers to having contacted the partner, or if the complaint refers to a specific Post Office branch, this should be referred to the Key Supplier Management Team with responsibility for that area for action.

Complaints regarding Teleperformance (TP) will usually be replied to by IPS following investigation by the Key Supplier Management Team. Complaints regarding DX Secure will usually be replied to by IPS following investigation by the Central Customer Service Teams with DX Secure.

Further information about the Procedures for dealing with partner complaints can be found below under Dealing with Partnership Complaints below.

**Interview Office Network (ION) (Including Video Interview Service (VIS)) Complaints**

Complaints, general enquiries and any comments (positive and negative) received at the Interview Office or Video Interview Service (VIS) location will be forwarded, by internal mail or, for VIS by the Local Administrator, by post, to the Customer Service Manager in the centralised team in Newport.

The Customer Service Team will manage these complaints in the same way as Partner Complaints, contacting the Interview Office Manager (IOM), Assistant Area Manager (AAM) if further information or input required.

**National Identity Service (NIS) Complaints**

General complaints, enquiries and any comments, relating to the National Identity Scheme (ID cards) received in regional Customer Service Teams or TEBs should be filtered to the HQ Enquiries (hqenquiries@ips.gsi.gov.uk) mailbox. The Parliamentary Correspondence Management Team (PCMT) is resourced to handle and deal with all types of general enquiries about ID cards. However, specific complaints relating to ID card applications will be handled by the Durham Customer Service Liaison Team
Passport Verification Service (PVS) Complaints

Complaints regarding the provision of the Passport Validation Service (PVS) will be dealt with by the PVS Management Team. All complaints are logged. Responses from PVS to the complainant should be forwarded to the Customer Service team for retention. Please see How to Handle PVS Complaints below.

Time Taken To Reply to Complaints / Acknowledgements

Where offices are dealing with complaints promptly there should be no need for acknowledgements that could be followed a day later by a substantive reply.

The Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for providing a substantive reply to a written complaint remains 10 working days. Simply despatching an acknowledgement, which should be within two working days, does not meet the 10 day target and the aim should be to provide a full reply wherever possible. There will however be cases where the matter is complex or requires further enquiries and here a detailed interim reply should be sent within 5 days, providing details of when a full response will be given. In these cases such an interim reply will be regarded as complying with the requirement to respond within 10 working days.

For all Chief Executive (PC) and Customer Comment (CC) cases an acknowledgement will automatically be sent on receipt of the case by the Parliamentary Correspondence Management Team (PCMT). Regions should not normally send an interim reply in these cases.

Signing off replies

The ‘guidance notes that accompany our application packs direct customers to complain to Customer Service Managers in the first instance rather than Regional Managers; such complaints should be signed off by the Customer Service Manager. Complaints received in a regional office would generally be signed off on behalf of the Customer Services team.

All complaints addressed personally to a Regional or Network Operations Manager by name should be seen and signed off by them. All other serious complaints, such as those relating to individual members of staff, should be seen and dealt with by the Business Services Manager. Any cases involving large claims for compensation (i.e. over £500) should be referred to the Regional Manager, Business Services Manager or those with “Delegated Responsibility” for signing off.

Draft responses for Chief Executive (PC) or Customer Complaint (CC) will normally be drafted by Customer Service Managers-(deputy CSM). CC cases will go to Regional Managers/ HQ equivalents for sign off and Stage 3
Parliamentary Complaints (PC cases) will go to an Executive Director for sign off.

**Dealing with Email complaints**

Complaints received by e-mail should be acknowledged within 48 hours. An interim reply should be sent within 5 working days if a substantive reply is unlikely to be possible within 10 days, in line with the Key Performance Indicator (KPI).

**Use of the telephone**

Replies in writing are often sent when it would be more effective to deal with the complaint by telephone. Staff should use the telephone in dealing with straightforward complaints where further clarification is required or when it can easily be resolved this way. Staff should however, follow this up with a response in writing, when a full explanation is required or it appears that a written response is the customer’s preference. When no telephone number is included in the letter staff should not attempt to obtain a telephone number by any other means.

Complaints received by telephone, even if resolved at the time, should nevertheless, be recorded. Staff should complete a complaint pro forma and pass to the Central Services Team for recording or further response as necessary.

**Persistent Complaints**

In a very small number of cases, a complainant will keep coming back with the same complaint when it has already been answered in as full a manner as possible. The Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (PCA) describe such correspondents as ‘vexatious litigants’ and say that it is acceptable to adopt a policy of ‘three strikes and you are out’, that is, if the same complaint is answered three times and there is nothing more to say, the correspondence can be closed. The PCA suggest the following draft: - ‘In fairness to other complainants, unless you have a new point, we will now regard this correspondence as closed’.

Care should be taken to only use this approach where the same issue is raised, not where different issues are raised by the same complainant.

**Compensation Policy**

The Compensation Act 2006 states that “An apology, an offer of treatment or other redress, shall not of itself amount to an admission of negligence or breach of statutory duty.”

Although compensation is the exception rather than the rule there are clearly cases where financial redress is appropriate and it is vital for IPS to have a clear compensation policy that is understood by staff and customers.
In the large majority of cases IPS will have no legal liability to meet claims from passport holders for compensation arising from errors or omissions by its staff. It would only be in exceptional cases where the legal position would need to be outlined to a customer, however it should be made clear that information provided relates in general terms to the law in respect of issuing or refusing passports. IPS should not provide specific legal advice and applicants should be advised to consult an independent legal advisor regarding their case if they consider it appropriate to do so.

Whilst the legal obligation may not be there, as a matter of policy, IPS accepts that it has a moral obligation to reimburse any out of pocket expenses incurred by a customer as a direct consequence of an error or omission by a member of staff. Compensation for such errors by IPS should take the form of an ex-gratia payment and could cover items such as replacement documents, additional travel to IPS’ offices, telephone and postal costs at one end of the scale to the cost of the loss of a holiday at the other. Each case should be treated on its merits.

Full details on IPS Compensation, Consolatory and Ex-gratia Payments Procedures can be found under Compensation, Consolatory and Ex-Gratia Payments below.

**Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration**

In publicising its complaints procedure IPS is expected to draw customers’ attention to the fact that if they are unhappy with the way their complaint has been dealt with they can take their case to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (PCA) via their MP. The PCA has the remit - “To investigate and report on complaints of maladministration on the part of central government departments and other non-departmental public bodies referred by members of the House of Commons”.

The PCA will investigate and decide if “maladministration” has occurred and, if so, advise on what an appropriate remedy would be. In the leaflet produced by the Office of the PCA “maladministration” is defined as including: -

- Avoidable delays;
- Faulty procedures;
- Not telling a person who has complained about their rights to appeal;
- Unfairness, bias or prejudice;
- Giving advice that is misleading or unsuitable;
- Refusing to answer reasonable questions;
- Being impolite and not apologising properly for mistakes;
- Mistakes in handling someone’s claims;
- Not offering a suitable remedy when one is necessary.
Most cases referred to the PCA involve claims for compensation and staff dealing with such claims need to be aware of the factors that can constitute maladministration.

IPS has had comparatively few cases referred to the PCA that have been investigated. These cases are held by PCMT and can be made available to Customer Service staff on request.

For staff dealing with claims for compensation the lessons that need to be borne in mind from these findings are:-

- Cases should be fully made and explained with a minute detailing the reasons for the action taken.
- If a complaint is handled poorly then this can give rise to compensation as much as the original error. Therefore in making an offer of compensation, consideration needs to be given as to whether the complaint itself was satisfactorily dealt with;
- Financial compensation can be appropriate where procedures have not been correctly followed;
- That whilst compensation for distress and inconvenience is only paid in exceptional circumstances it is not acceptable to have a rigidly defined policy and not treat each case on its merits.

**Contributory Negligence**

Customers are advised to check the details in their passport or ID card. This has been conveyed in the guidance notes made available to our customers. Even where this guidance has not been given, advice over the years is that there is a duty of care on the customer to ensure that their passport or ID card is valid in all respects before travelling or using for identity purposes. Counsel’s opinion was given in 1995 in connection with a claim for compensation against IPS for a lost holiday due to an error when adding a child to an Old Blue passport. The view at the time was that if the case was taken to court, the court would be unlikely to find for the plaintiffs; but even if this did happen it was likely that a finding of contributory negligence could be made against them.

Management at the time considered the compensation policy in light of this advice and decided that as out of pocket expenses were reimbursed due to a moral responsibility such claims would not be reduced to take account of this idea of ‘contributory negligence’. Such claims anyway would prove difficult in deciding by how much they would be reduced and would be likely to involve disputes. This position remains unchanged; against a background of commitment to high levels of public service it would be inappropriate for IPS not to compensate in full where we have made the error.

When a consolatory payment for loss of enjoyment, worry, distress, hardship, inconvenience and botheration is being considered, then contributory negligence should form part of the decision on the amount of consolatory payment to be made.
**Turnaround times**

IPS provides a tiered application service (TAS), which is available to passport customers only. Please also see the TAS policy.

Under both the Premium and Fast Track services, IPS is contractually committed to providing the service within the guaranteed target time and **the additional fee, but not the standard service fee**, is refunded where the guarantee is not met. We would also consider responsibility for compensation claims arising from the consequences of the failure on the part of IPS to provide the service required in the specified time.

The Check & Send service is for those applicants not requiring a passport urgently. It should be emphasised that the Check & Send service is not a guaranteed service and all our messages to customers reflect this. Our partners undertake a basic check and IPS may need to undertake additional checks to confirm eligibility that may require additional time to complete. Therefore, IPS is not liable to meet compensation claims arising from any failure to meet the three-week turnaround target for partnership applications.

The standard services are for those applicants not requiring a passport urgently. Neither Standard Service is guaranteed and IPS is not liable to meet compensation claims arising from any routine failure (rather than IPS failure, error or omission as per paragraph 15 above) to meet either the three-week or six-week turnaround targets for these applications.

**Lost in the post**

Where IPS is liable for the loss of supporting documents (including foreign passports or travel documents) then the customer should be requested to obtain replacement documents and then submit a documented claim to IPS for reasonable expenses. Any claims would normally be expected to be received within 12 months of a passport application being processed by IPS.

Supporting documents are returned to the applicant by Royal Mail 2nd class post. If these are reported as lost in the post we have previously accepted a moral obligation to reimburse customers. Customers are however, now clearly advised that **The passport fee includes the cost of us returning your new passport by Secure Delivery, and returning your supporting documents by second-class post. You can pay an extra fee if you want us to return your supporting documents by Secure Delivery. Note: we will not provide compensation for any loss or delay resulting from us using second-class post when you have not asked for Secure Delivery.** The advice of Legal Advisors Branch was sought in reaching this decision and customers should in future be advised in writing that, unless the documents were lost within IPS, then reimbursement will not be made and the customer should contact Royal Mail.

**Delegated Authority**
Delegated authority is not only about the amount involved, but the complexity of the case; whether it is clear cut or involves judgement and whether there is a risk of criticism (‘novel or contentious’). Customer Service Managers should use their increased level of delegated authority to deal with any cases that are properly receipted and documented and are non contentious. If a case falls outside this remit they should use their discretion on the need to refer it further.

Production of receipts

Customer Service Managers may use their discretion to accept small claims without requesting receipts, unless the amount claimed seems disproportionate. Receipts may however be required where IPS is seeking payment or a contribution towards payment from a business partner and they should therefore be sought in such cases.

Any mileage claimed can be paid at the public transport rate, currently 23.8p per mile. If a round figure is claimed this should be paid if it is lower or equates to this rate.

Where loss of earnings is sought, evidence of this would still need to be requested in the form of an employers’ letter giving details of net daily or hourly pay. Where a gross amount is claimed, the payment is paid on a net basis and the standard rate of tax is deducted. More claims are now being received from the self employed and these are harder to evaluate. Customers should be asked to provide evidence of the rates that they charge and, if possible, details of any work commissioned that they lost as a result of an error on the part of IPS; again payment would be made at a net rate.

Where customers are claiming reimbursement of solicitors’ costs, they should be advised that IPS will not consider reimbursement of costs incurred in dealing with straightforward complaints for which the customer did not need legal advice. Solicitors should be advised that if they continue to deal with such complaints they do so at their own risk as to costs incurred.

Claims for reimbursement of loss of annual leave should be considered on the same basis as loss of earnings.

In the case of a missed trip we would also still request confirmation in writing that reimbursement has not already been sought/received from another source – e.g. a travel agent or insurance company.

Complaints Handling - Identity and Passport Service (IPS) Procedures

Our Complaints Procedure

The Identity and Passport Service (IPS) issue approximately 5.3 million passports per year and have begun the rollout of ID cards. We aim to provide
the highest level of service to our customers at all times, but sometimes things do go wrong.

We welcome useful comments and complaints from our customers, as they help us to improve our service.

We sometimes make mistakes, or circumstances beyond our control affect our service delivery standards. When this occurs, we will explain what has happened, apologise and do everything we can to put it right.

**Step One**

Complaints can be made by phone, letter, e-mail or fax

We will acknowledge receipt, investigate and let the customer know what went wrong and what we are doing to put it right

We will respond to complaints within 10 working days

We do not normally accept complaints after 12 months following the issue of the passport or ID Card.

**Step Two**

If following step one the customer is still not satisfied with our response, or they have a more general complaint (for example, a policy matter) that is not related to a specific application they can write to, fax or e-mail:

Parliamentary & Correspondence Management Team
IPS Chief Executive's Office
2 Marsham Street
4th Floor, Peel Building
London SW1P 4DF

Fax: 0870 336 9175
Email: hqenquiries@ips.gsi.gov.uk

**Step Three**

If the customer has followed step one and / or two and is still not satisfied, they may ask their Member of Parliament (MP) to raise the matter with our Chief Executive or the Home Office Minister responsible for the Identity and Passport Service (IPS).

**Step Four**

If they still remain dissatisfied they may ask their MP to raise the issue with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (PCA) (the Ombudsman).
The Ombudsman’s role is to investigate complaints by members of the public about the way government departments and their executive agencies have treated them.

**General Information about complaints**

The Cabinet Office’s former Service First team gave a useful working definition of a complaint as

“any expression of dissatisfaction that needs a response”.

Complaints made at the public counters and at an interview office (including Video Interview Service (VIS) locations) and NISCC offices, even if resolved at the time, should still be recorded for statistical purposes.

A `Customer Feedback’ form should always be available to customers at public counters and interview offices (including Video Interview Service (VIS) locations) and NISCC offices. The completed forms should be sent to the relevant regional Customer Service Manager for collation (all ID card complaints will be handled by the Customer Services Team in Durham); however replies are not required unless warranted by the comments or specifically requested by the customer.

**Positive Comments**

All positive comments should also be recorded for statistical purposes.

**Compensation, Consolatory and Ex-Gratia Payments**

We accept that there may be times when our mistakes can cause expense or financial loss to our customers and we will consider claims for compensation, consolatory or ex-gratia payments, treating each case on its merits. Please also see How to handle Compensation, Consolatory and Ex-Gratia Payments below.

**Role of Headquarters and Regional Offices**

All Chief Executive (PC) and Customer Comment (CC) cases are logged in by Parliamentary Correspondence Management Team (PCMT), they will mark the file with the target reply date and will record when they are completed.

Where the complaint relates to an application, which has been, or is being, dealt with by a regional office the case is referred to that office for comment.

Complaints relating to IPS policy will be answered by the relevant HQ section. This system ensures that the most appropriate person deals with the complaint.
A number of letters addressed to the Director of Operations are in fact general enquiries. These are not made up as Customer Comment cases, but are forwarded to the relevant regional Customer Service Manager to deal with directly.

**Statistical Information**

All passport complaints are logged onto the Passport Application Complaints database on receipt.

All ID card complaints will be logged by the Durham Customer Service Team on the ID card log.

Statistics on Tolerance Levels are produced on a weekly basis and a more detailed breakdown of complaints by “type” category is produced on a monthly basis. These statistics are issued by the Parliamentary Correspondence Management Team (PCMT). Please also see Time Taken to Reply to Complaints/ Acknowledgements below.

**How to Reply**

Guidance for Complaints and Correspondence Replies was issued by the National Customer Service Team in September 2008 and should be used as the standard to provide effective responses to customers.

This guidance covers

- When to use the telephone
- Correspondence Standards
- Writing to people with visual impairments
- Words and phrases to avoid
- Style, spelling and grammar
- Netiquette
- Standards to check for all correspondence

Please also see Signing off Replies above.

**How to handle Interview Office (Including Video Interview Service (VIS)) Complaints**

Complaints regarding the interview, including Video Interview Service (VIS) process will be dealt with by the Central Customer Service Team.

Any complaints about an application or the application process received at interview offices will be transferred by internal mail to the Customer Services Team. Complaints received at VIS locations should be forwarded by post, by the Local Administrator, to the Customer Service Manager in Newport.
Regional offices will be responsible for any compensation paid, however all complaints concerning the interview process will be compiled with input from the relevant Interview Office Managers (IOM).

All complaints should be copied to the Assistant Area Manager to ensure that timescales for responses are met, especially where the complaint relates to an interview office or VIS location which has restricted opening hours.

Regional offices will maintain monthly management information and prepare monthly reports detailing interview process complaints and any compensation paid.

Any customer comments received at an interview office or VIS site, not related to a current application, should be referred to that office’s catchment area regional office.

**Procedures for Dealing with Partnership Complaints**

Customer complaints on our partnership arrangements with Post Office Ltd, DX Secure, Teleperformance (TP), Prestige or Steria/SP&SL will normally be received by post, through TEB, forwarded via TP or as feedback via e-mail from the IPS website.

Complaints will normally fall in to one of two categories, either

- comment about the operation or policy relating to the IPS partnership arrangements in general, or
- comment about the partner's level of service or the manner or behaviour of a partner's member of staff when dealing with applications on our behalf.

Either category may also, include a refund request or a compensation claim and guidance covering scenarios in these cases is outlined separately below.

If the complaint falls into the first category and can be dealt with by IPS then the usual complaint procedures should be followed.

Care should be taken however if the complainant also refers to having contacted the partner. In such cases, there should be liaison with the relevant partner to ensure a consistent response and to avoid duplication of effort. Guidance can be sought from the Key Supplier Management Team, if required.

If a complaint has been received via Teleperformance (TP) there should normally be enough information to deal with the complaint as TP have been advised to collect as much information as possible.

**Prestige Complaints**
In the event of an interpreter failing to turn up or turning up late to a pre-arranged interview the customer will be entitled to claim compensation from IPS for any genuine and reasonable losses; Prestige is required to reimburse IPS against any such claims. IPS will provide Prestige valid receipts for all claims made by customers in excess of £10.00. Reimbursement of such claims for compensation will take the form of service credits to IPS.

**Check & Send Service**

The Check & Send service is for those applicants not requiring a passport urgently. It should be emphasised that the Check & Send service is not a guaranteed service and all our messages to customers reflect this.

Our partners undertake a basic check and IPS may need to undertake additional checks to confirm eligibility that may require additional time to complete. Therefore, IPS is not liable to meet compensation claims arising from any failure to meet the three-week turnaround target for partnership applications.

Any complaints raised against the Post Office should be dealt with using the procedure detailed below, see below.

**Lost in Post**

IPS despatch the majority of passports using Secure Delivery, our partner is DX Secure, whilst a minority are despatched via secure courier using Royal Mail Special Delivery. Secure Delivery can also be used to return customer documentation if the appropriate payment has been made.

If a passport is reported as not being received by a customer and IPS conduct an investigation with DX Secure and there is no evidence of an error on the part of IPS, we have accepted a moral obligation to reissue a passport to the customer and claim reimbursement for costs of the passport from DX Secure. If the conclusion to an investigation shows that DX Secure has mis-posted the passport then IPS are in a position to reclaim the costs as specified in the contract.

If the fee is not paid supporting documents are returned to the applicant by Royal Mail 2nd class post. If these are reported as lost in the post we have previously accepted a moral obligation to reimburse customers.

Customers are however now clearly advised that

“The passport fee includes the cost of us returning your new passport by Secure Delivery, and returning your supporting documents by second-class post. You can pay an extra fee if you want us to return your supporting documents by Secure Delivery. Note: we will not provide compensation for any loss or delay resulting from us using second-class post when you have not asked for Secure Delivery.”
The advice of Legal Advisors Branch was sought in reaching this decision and customers should in future be advised in writing that, unless the documents were lost within IPS, then reimbursement will not be made and the customer should contact Royal Mail. A copy of the letter can be found on the IPS admin System. This letter can then be used by the customer to ask Royal Mail to investigate the loss.

Customers seeking investigation or compensation should be advised to contact Royal Mail Customer Service on 0845 774 0740. Alternatively they should obtain form P58 from their local Post Office branch and return it completed to the address on the form. Royal Mail will normally only investigate after 15 days and the maximum compensation available is £39.00.

Where applications are reported as lost in the post en route from our partners to IPS then the partner will be liable for any costs (for replacement documents etc.) arising from this loss. This should however be unlikely as 99% of Partner applications are received via Royal Mail Special Delivery.

**Post Office Ltd**

If a complaint refers or relates to Post Office Ltd then the following procedures should be followed: -

When received by Customer Service Team the complaint should be assessed and a decision taken as to whether it needs input from Post Office Ltd for IPS to provide a reply. Post Office Ltd will only reply when the complaint is about a member of their staff.

If the complaint relates to a specific Post Office member of staff then it is important that as much information as possible is included. This should be then forwarded via the most appropriate method.

- There will be occasions however where IPS might need to reply even though the complaint was about a specific partnership office, e.g. if it appeared that the partner had attempted to advise on nationality. In such cases IPS will have to respond following input from the relevant Post Office Ltd Customer Care Manager. Copies of the final IPS response should then be sent to the partner as necessary.

In addition there may be rare occasions when a customer complaint/comment relates to suspected fraud within a partnership office. All such cases should be referred to the Key Supplier Management Team to deal with.

When a complaint is forwarded to Post Office Ltd a standard stock letter should be sent to the customer.

**Post Office Operational Complaints**

There will be occasions when problems of an operational nature are brought to your attention. This can be the positioning of barcodes on application forms...
received from Post Office Ltd, the quality of the application forms supplied to Post Office Ltd by Adare or Post Office Ltd using the wrong regional address for their catchment area.

All these issues should be reported to the Key Supplier Management Team who will report these issues to Post Office Ltd for investigation and appropriate action to be taken.

There are occasions where Post Office Ltd sell IPS dedicated Special Delivery envelopes to members of public and the packages are received at IPS instead of by their rightful owner.

These incidents should be recorded on a spreadsheet and sent to the Key Supplier Management Team every two weeks.

These packages should be forwarded to their rightful owner using Royal Mail Special Delivery.

The customer helpline number for Post Office Ltd is 01226 273550.

**Procedures for Dealing with DX Secure Complaints**

When a complaint is received by Customer Service Team it should be assessed and a decision taken as to whether it needs a reply from IPS or DX Secure.

If the decision is taken to reply locally then a complete audit trail is required from DX Secure to attach to the file to establish what issues or problems occurred with the delivery.

Confirmation must always be obtained from DX Secure that the customer has **NOT** already been dealt with and received compensation directly from DX Secure.

If the complaint is to be dealt with by DX Secure then details should be emailed using the proforma.

When a complaint is forwarded to DX Secure a standard stock letter should be forwarded to the customer advising them that DX Secure will respond to them directly within two weeks.

For guidance on ex-gratia and compensation claims against DX Secure see Ex-Gratia and Compensation Claims against DX Secure below.

**Procedures for Dealing with Teleperformance (TP) Complaints**

Complaints regarding TP will be replied to by IPS. Details of the complaint should be endorsed on a TP complaints proforma and forwarded to the ‘TP Enquiries Inbox’. TP will investigate the complaint and provide a response within one week of receipt.
40.2 If the complaint is of an urgent nature and likely to escalate the proforma should be endorsed ‘URGENT’.

Where possible TP will provide a response within 48 hours, however the agreed SLA is five working days.

It is important to obtain all facts relating to calls made by the customer before an answer is formulated.

Where a customer has lodged a telephone complaint direct with TP their Complaints Resolution Unit (CRU) will commence immediate investigation. An e-mail will be sent to the nominated Customer Service Team e-mail address advising of the issue and confirmation of the investigation outcome will be provided within one week.

Where the outcome of the investigation is in dispute, or further information is required a copy of the call recording may be obtained from TP. The completed investigation report should be returned to the ‘TP Enquiries Inbox’, accompanied by an explanation of the issue and a request for the recording to be provided. If the recording is available this will be provided within one week of receipt of the request. For guidance on compensation claims against TP see Compensation Claims against TP below.

**Procedures for Dealing with Steria/ SP & SL Complaints**

Steria is only liable for service credits; IPS is liable for any compensation due to the customer - this relates to errors not identified in the examination process.

If an application is received, it has clearly been noted that the documentation was submitted and the documents appear to have been lost within Steria. The documents should be replaced by IPS and the case referred to the Regional Contract Manager for further action. See Compensation Claims against Steria/ SP&SL below for further information.

**How to handle PVS Complaints**

Complaints regarding the provision of the Passport Validation Service (PVS) will be dealt with by the PVS Management Team. All complaints are logged.

**How to handle requests for Compensation, Consolatory and Ex-Gratia Payments**

IPS would normally only consider an ex-gratia payment for loss of a holiday where:

- The applicant was prevented from travelling as a direct result of IPS failure to meet the guaranteed service on a Premium of Fast Track application, provided that the application was straightforward and
properly completed (This will apply even if the delay is as a result of SMS failing to deliver the passport the next working day as allowed for by IPS), OR

- The applicant was prevented from travelling as a direct result of IPS failure to undertake an interview at the time and place specified in the letter to them, OR
- An error or omission by a member of staff or a fault in a passport book which has prevented travel, OR
- An error or omission by a member of staff or a fault on and ID card which has prevented European travel, OR
- Backlogs at IPS are excessive (i.e. double our published turnaround targets), the applicant had applied for the service most appropriate to the travel needs and it would have been reasonable for the applicant to expect the return of the passport before the travel date.

If a trip was missed in full due to our failure to meet a guaranteed service level on a straightforward, properly completed Premium or Fast Track application, IPS would clearly bear the whole cost; however there are cases where a customer has missed a day or two of their holiday. In these cases we should reimburse on a pro rata basis a percentage of the holiday lost and any costs incurred rearranging flights etc.

The principle to be followed is that compensation must be fair and reasonable in the light of all the facts and should restore the complainant to the position the customer would have enjoyed had the mistake not occurred. In making an offer of compensation IPS is not accepting liability for any action or inaction on its part, but deems it appropriate in the circumstances of the case to make the offer.

As with all expenditure transactions, a complete audit trail must be retained for compensation payments. This should include all correspondence with the customer and any supporting calculations and evidence relating to the agreed payment.

Any cases involving large claims for compensation (i.e. over £500) should be referred to the Regional Manager or Business Service Manager or those with “Delegated Responsibility” for signing off. Please also see Delegated Authority above.

**Distress and Inconvenience (Consolatory Payments)**

Current Treasury and Cabinet Office guidance indicates that they do not consider it is appropriate to recompense for anything other than quantifiable loss. Payments for distress and inconvenience should only be made in exceptional circumstances. In the past we considered consolatory payments only where the customer suffered some form of physical injury as a result of IPS’ negligent act. However, this policy was felt to be too restrictive and, whilst retaining the principle of considering consolatory payments only in exceptional cases, each claim should be treated on its merits.
Consolatory payments should therefore be considered only in those exceptional cases where the customer has suffered non-financial loss in terms of loss of enjoyment, worry, distress, inconvenience, hardship and “botheration”. However, this should only be where any problems have arisen as a result of events within the control of IPS or where IPS have failed to mitigate for events outside its control, i.e., if an office were to close early because of a security alert then it would be reasonable to expect attempts to be made to contact any customers who had booked an appointment or were collecting a passport or an ID Card.

Clearly, this approach means that it is difficult to provide clear cut guidelines as to when a claim for a consolatory payment should be considered. However, on a very broad basis, consideration as to whether such a payment is appropriate can be along the lines of the level of distress and inconvenience caused, how this compares to other cases, and evaluation of the ability to replace that which is lost – for example, missing a holiday which could be rebooked might be regarded as causing less distress and inconvenience than missing a one-off event, such as a wedding.

Guidance from the PCA and the Cabinet Office regarding consolatory payments suggests that awards should not be excessive and it is unlikely that awards over £200 to £300 would be involved.

The decision on whether consolatory payments can be made should be made by the HEO Customer Service Manager and details of any case involving a consolatory payment should be recorded in a monthly Customer Service report that is sent to HQ MI.

It is still appropriate to outline the IPS policy on compensation and to make it clear that consolatory payments are not the norm.

Consideration should be given to Contributory Negligence when deciding such cases – please see Contributory Negligence above.

**Time an application has been in the system**

The IPS offers customers five tiers of service with different contractual terms:

- The Premium service is only available at IPS counters and is a guaranteed priority service for straightforward, properly completed applications for passport renewals, amendments, and applications for those under 16 where they are currently included on a parent's UK passport, the passport is available, where there are no parental responsibility issues, and national status is easily determined. The Premium service has a turnaround target of 4 hours.
- The Fast Track service is available at IPS counters and is a guaranteed one-calendar week service (excluding bank and public holidays) for all straightforward, properly completed applications except for those for adult first-time applicants. Passports are returned by
Secure Delivery, the 24-hour Central Print service applies and our secure delivery courier are contracted to attempt delivery the next working day.

- The Check & Send service is available through our high street partners at selected Post Office branches. Applications submitted via the Check & Send service are given priority by IPS, but it is not a guaranteed service. The turnaround target is three weeks from receipt by the partner, except for those applications from adult first time applicants.

- The Standard service for applications other than for adult first time applicants is a non-guaranteed service with applications being submitted directly by post. The turnaround target is three-weeks from receipt by IPS.

- The Standard service adult first time applicants is a non-guaranteed service with applications being submitted directly by post. The turnaround target is six-weeks from receipt by IPS.

- For ID cards, customers are required to attend an NISCC office. The application is processed by a regional office and it is expected that for straightforward applications, turnaround will be within 10 days.

Under both the Premium and Fast Track services, IPS are contractually committed to providing the service within the guaranteed target time and the additional fee, **but not the standard service fee**, is refunded where the guarantee is not met on straightforward, properly completed applications as defined on the IPS website and in the Notes for Guidance. We would also consider responsibility for compensation claims arising from the consequences of the failure on the part of the IPS to provide the service required in the specified time.

The Check & Send service is for those applicants not requiring a passport urgently. It should be emphasised that the Check & Send service is not a guaranteed service and all our messages to customers reflect this.

Our partners undertake a basic check and IPS may need to undertake additional checks to confirm eligibility that may require additional time to complete. Therefore, IPS is not liable to meet compensation claims arising from any failure to meet the three-week turnaround target for partnership applications.

The standard services are for those applicants not requiring a passport urgently. Neither Standard Service is guaranteed and IPS are not liable to meet compensation claims arising from any routine failure (rather than IPS failure, error or omission as above) to meet either the three-week or six-week turnaround targets for these applications.

As there is no guaranteed service available for obtaining an ID card, IPS are not liable to meet compensation claims arising from any routine failure (rather than IPS failure, error or omission as above) to meet the turnaround targets for these applications. Please also see Production of Receipts.

**Refunds and compensation claims against the Post Office**
If it is established that an application has been lost en route from Post Office Ltd to IPS then the Post Office will be liable for any costs (replacement documents etc) arising from this loss. This applies if it is proven that these applications were not sent to the IPS by Special Delivery or there is clear evidence that the IPS has never received the Special Delivery package.

In some cases IPS may obtain replacement documents or such like, however any such claims should be referred, by the most appropriate means, to Post Office Ltd for settlement.

46.3 If it is established that IPS did receive the Special Delivery package containing the application form and documents then IPS will be liable for any costs (replacement documents etc) arising from this loss.

If an application has been delayed due to a Post Office Ltd error then letter 461 should have informed the customer that they are entitled to claim a refund of the partner handling charge.

If any other claim is made in these cases this should also be referred to Post Office Ltd to deal with.

The Check & Send service is not a guaranteed service. Post Office Ltd undertakes a basic check and IPS may need to undertake additional checks to confirm eligibility that may require additional time to complete. Our messages to customers are clear and they should not book any travel arrangements until in possession of a valid passport. IPS is not liable to meet compensation claims arising from any failure to meet the turnaround target for partnership work.

Customers seeking investigation or compensation should be advised to contact Royal Mail Customer Service on 0845 774 0740. Alternatively they should obtain form P58 from their local Post Office branch and return it completed to the address on the form. Royal Mail will normally only investigate after 15 days and the maximum compensation available is £39.00.

Where applications are reported as lost in the post en route from our partners to IPS then the partner will be liable for any costs (for replacement documents etc.) arising from this loss. This should however be unlikely as 99% of Partner applications are received via Royal Mail Special Delivery.

**Ex-Gratia and Compensation Claims against DX Secure**

IPS would normally only consider an ex-gratia payment for loss of a holiday where the applicant was prevented from travelling as a direct result of IPS failure to meet the guaranteed service on a Premium or Fast Track application, provided the application was straightforward and properly completed. This also applies even if the delay is as a result of DX Secure NOT attempting to deliver the passport the next working day as allowed for by IPS.
Please Note: Compensation should not be considered when DX Secure have attempted the delivery of the passport correctly and the applicant was unavailable to sign for receipt.

If it is established that compensation is appropriate outside the guaranteed service e.g. a direct error by IPS or it is established that DX Secure mis-posted the passport the principle to follow is that the compensation must be fair and reasonable in the light of all the facts and should restore the complainant to the position the customer would have enjoyed had the mistake not occurred.

If payment has been made to the customer and DX Secure have admitted liability and have agreed to meet the costs either the Central Customer Service Manager or the relevant Key Supplier Management Team should liaise directly with DX Secure to ensure reimbursement is made directly to the regional office that made the compensation payment. IPS will be responsible for providing a contact name within the Newport Finance Department and requesting that DX Secure forward a cheque made payable to IPS with a supporting letter quoting the Customer Complaint reference number and the full name and address of the applicant.

On receipt of the cheque and supporting letter from DX Secure, Newport Finance Departments will copy the letter and send to the Central Customer Service Manager confirming receipt of all monies outstanding, thus allowing the case to be closed.

Those cases where DX Secure do not accept liability or will only pay a portion of the compensation due, these cases should be referred to the relevant Key Supplier Management Team with responsibility for that area, who will then pursue the case with DX Secure for reimbursement of the full amount of compensation paid by IPS.

If a complaint is received from the customer asking for reimbursement of excess postage paid to Royal Mail of £1.23, this complaint should be sent directly to DX Secure for investigation. A standard letter is to be sent to our customers and DX Secure will investigate and pay compensation directly to the customer.

IPS should annotate the proforma that they wish to be notified of the outcome of the investigation. The file should not be closed until this result has been notified by DX Secure.

Confirmation must always be obtained from DX Secure that the customer has NOT already been dealt with and received compensation directly from DX Secure.

Compensation Claims against TP

If it is established that compensation is appropriate the principle to follow is that the compensation must be fair and reasonable in the light of all facts and
should restore the complainant to the position the customer would have enjoyed had the mistake not occurred.

IPS will be responsible for paying compensation to the customer even if it has been clearly identified the error is with TP. Those cases where TP have admitted limited liability i.e. they have endorsed on the proforma that the agent was at fault and the complaint is upheld should be dealt with locally. If the compensation paid is in excess of £500 the completed case should be forwarded to the relevant Key Supplier Management Team, with responsibility for that area, who will liaise further with TP to identify if reimbursement is appropriate.

Any reimbursement obtained will be paid directly to the regional office that made the compensation payment; Customer Service Managers will be notified of this on the return of the case.

**Compensation Claims against Steria/ SP&SL**

If an application is received, it has clearly been noted that the documentation was submitted and the documents appear to have been lost within Steria. The documents should be replaced by IPS and the case referred to the Regional Contract Manager for further action.

The completed case should be forwarded to your Regional Contract Manager who will pursue the case with a view of settling the claim between both parties.