

Postal Redress Service (POSTRS): Independent Complaint Reviewer
Interim Report January - June 2019.

Introduction

This is my fifth report on POSTRS – which deals with disputes between postal operators who are members of the Service and their customers. This is my interim report covering 1 January to 30 June 2019.

My Role

I am an independent consultant and am not based at CEDR (the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution), nor am I part of that organisation. There are two aspects to my role.

Firstly, I can consider individual complaints about certain aspects of the level of service provided by POSTRS. Under my terms of reference¹ and the rules of the Service² I am only able to consider points relating to POSTRS' or CEDR's quality of service in respect of alleged administrative errors, delays, staff rudeness or other such service matters. Other than referring to them where appropriate, I cannot comment on the content or validity of the Service's rules.

I can review cases where a user of the Service has complained and, having been through CEDR's complaint process, remains dissatisfied with the outcome of that complaint. I cannot consider the merits or otherwise of decisions made by CEDR's adjudicators; nor can I investigate or comment on the substance or outcomes of applications made by claimants. Where appropriate, I may make recommendations based on my findings.

The second aspect of my role is to conduct overall reviews of service complaints and produce reports accordingly. These are based on findings from my reviews of individual complaints; and by examining and analysing all or some of the service complaints that POSTRS have handled as I see fit.

¹ https://www.cedr.com/docslib/Independent_Reviewer_Terms_of_Ref_NOV.pdf

² <https://www.cedr.com/consumer/postrs/customers/rules/>

CEDR's Complaints Procedure

The complaints procedure³ covers POSTRS and it explains the scope of the procedure along with the two internal stages of review that take place before, if necessary, a complaint is referred to me. The procedure is articulated clearly with timescales and information about what can be expected. In brief, if after the first stage response to a complaint customers remain dissatisfied they can ask for escalation to stage two of the process, where a senior staff member (usually a Director) will review the complaint. Where this does not resolve the matter, the complaint can be referred to me for independent review.

This Report

No complaints were referred to me during the first half of 2019. For this report I reviewed all the service complaints received by POSTRS between 1 January and 30 June 2019.

My Findings

Quantitative

My reports risk appearing repetitive, as year on year POSTRS continues to receive a very low number of complaints about its service. Out of the 337 cases it handled in this reporting period there were five complaints about POSTRS' service. This represents 1.5% - which is down slightly from 1.7% on the full year ending December 2018. In statistical and absolute terms this is an insignificant number of complaints.

Of the 337 total claims handled in the first half of 2019, 41% (139) received a final decision from an adjudicator. The remaining 59% were either outside the scope for investigation by POSTRS, or were settled without the need to progress to an adjudicator.

Of the 139 adjudicated cases, POSTRS found wholly for the complainant in 5.0% (7) of cases; 8.6% (12) partly for the complainant; and 86.4% (120) wholly for the postal operator.

³ [https://www.cedr.com/docslib/CEDR_Complaints_procedure_\(1\).pdf](https://www.cedr.com/docslib/CEDR_Complaints_procedure_(1).pdf)

This provides a useful context in which to view the complaints made about POSTRS itself, and the figures are broadly consistent with my previous reports. A very low number of applications were found in favour of the claimant, yet there were only five complaints about POSTRS - suggesting that the Service continues to work well.

Table 1 below gives a breakdown of the service complaints about POSTRS:

Table 1

In Scope	Partly in Scope	Out of Scope	Total
3	1	1	5

One case was incorrectly classified as partly in scope, when it should have been out of scope. CEDR have amended this and the correct position is shown in the table above.

Table 2 below gives a breakdown by outcomes for the four cases in scope and partly in scope:

Table 2

Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not Upheld	Total
0	3	1	4

These remain very low numbers and it is not possible to identify any trends or themes. However, I found no evidence of any systemic or underlying issues.

Qualitative

POSTRS handled all five cases within 30 working days, with an average of 19 and a range of four to 29. Two cases were acknowledged within one working day; two took three working days; and one did not require an acknowledgement due to the nature of the case (which I am satisfied was a reasonable approach).

I examined all five complaints and am satisfied that the correct outcomes were reached. CEDR made goodwill payments in all three of the in scope cases (one of £25.00 and two of £20.00). Two of these related to minor administration errors or delays.

One case concerned an allegation of misconduct and unprofessional behaviour by a POSTRS call handler. The call in question was reviewed at Stage 1 and it was acknowledged that the tone and approach taken by the call handler was, whilst out of character, not of the expected standard. The Stage 1 review was of a high quality. As well as awarding compensation it gave a full and honest explanation; and it outlined the action taken, in the form of additional training. Cases such as this are, in my experience, rare. However, I was pleased to see the seriousness with which CEDR treated the matter and it is evidence of an effective complaints process.

The partly in scope complaint was not upheld and was complex, as the customer had combined it with a complaint about the Solicitors Regulatory Authority. The various issues were a little difficult to unpick, but the POSTRS element (which is all this report is concerned with) was comprehensively dealt with. Ultimately the complaint was referred to me, but as I reviewed it in July I will cover it as part of my next report.

The one out of scope case was wholly about the adjudication decision.

Other than the case mentioned above that progressed to Stage 3, no cases progressed to Stage 2.

I noted that in one case a customer had been sent an unsigned letter. There is nothing to suggest this was anything other than an oversight, but such instances are best avoided.

Conclusion

The frequency and the proportion of complaints about POSTRS quality of service remain low. This is evidence of a continuing good performance, and I have no concerns.

The complaints process is well articulated and the evidence from my review shows it to be working effectively. The responses to consumers that I looked at were of a good standard.

Recommendations

I have no recommendations.

Acknowledgements

I have been given open and unrestricted access to all POSTRS' and CEDR's systems and records along with carte blanche in respect of conducting this audit as I saw fit. I am grateful for the patience and assistance given to me in terms of navigating systems and dealing with my various questions. I am grateful, too, for CEDR's responses to the occasional points that I raised as I examined the casework.

Chris Holland

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CA Holland'.

Independent Complaint Reviewer

17 August 2019