

Postal Redress Service (POSTRS): Independent Complaint Reviewer Report For 2019.

1. Introduction

This is my sixth POSTRS report - which deals with disputes between postal operators who are members of the Service and their customers. Together with my interim report¹ of 17 August 2019 it covers the full calendar year 2019.

2. My Role

I am an independent consultant and am not based at CEDR, 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 reference² and the rules of the Service³ I can only consider points concerning 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 to POSTRS or CEDR 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, consider or comment on the substance or outcomes of cases or 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 as I see fit all or some of the service complaints that POSTRS have handled.

¹https://mk0cedrxdkly80r1e6.kinstacdn.com/app/uploads/2019/11/POSTRS_interim_review_final_Jan-June_2019.pdf

²<https://mk0cedrxdkly80r1e6.kinstacdn.com/app/uploads/2019/12/Independent-Reviewer-TOR-v2.pdf>

³<https://mk0cedrxdkly80r1e6.kinstacdn.com/app/uploads/2020/02/POSTRS-rules-2017-revised-3.pdf>

3. CEDR's Complaints Procedure

The complaints procedure⁴ 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 manager or Director will review the complaint. Where this does not resolve the matter, the complaint can be referred to me for independent review.

4. This Report

This report covers my overall review of the way CEDR handled complaints about POSTRS in 2019. My quantitative findings incorporate those from my interim report and cover from 1 January to 31 December, as do my findings on timescales. The rest of my qualitative findings focus on the second half of the year; my interim report covers the first half. I had one complaint referred to me under POSTRS' complaints procedure during 2019, which I comment on in my findings (section 5).

5. My Findings

(a) Quantitative

Total applications to POSTRS were up from 403 to 694 year on year - an increase of 72% - but as has been the case for the last few years, it receives very few complaints about its service. This year was no exception, with seven complaints (coincidentally, the same number as last year). This represents 1.0% of applications, which is down from 1.7% in 2018 and remains insignificant in absolute terms.

Of the 694 total applications handled in 2019, 61% (421) received a final decision from an adjudicator. The remaining 39% were either outside the scope for investigation by POSTRS, or were settled without the need to progress to an adjudicator. This is broadly in line with 2018, when the respective percentages were 57% and 43%.

⁴ <https://mk0cedrxdkly80r1e6.kinstacdn.com/app/uploads/2020/02/CEDR-Complaints-Procedure-2020.pdf>

Of the 421 adjudicated claims, POSTRS found wholly for the claimant in six (1.4%) cases; partly for the claimant in 29 cases (6.9%); and wholly for the postal operator in 386 cases (91.7%). Again, these figures are broadly consistent with 2018.

This gives a useful context in which to view complaints made about POSTRS itself; and, as in previous years, whilst most cases were found in favour of the postal operator the fact that only seven complaints were made about POSTRS suggests that the Service continues to function well on an operational level.

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

Table 1

In Scope	Partly in Scope	Out of Scope	Total
4	3	0	7

Table 2 below gives a breakdown by outcome for those complaints that were fully or partly in scope:

Table 2

Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not Upheld	Total
1	5	1	7

These are low numbers and it is not possible to identify any trends or themes. The consistently low volume of complaints indicates an absence of any systemic or underlying issues; and the fact that CEDR fully or partly upheld six out of the seven complaints made suggests that it is taking those complaints seriously and making redress when appropriate.

(b) Qualitative

(i) Timescales (2019 full year)

Whilst mostly within target, responses took longer than in 2018 and acknowledgements were slower.

CEDR handled six of the seven complaints (86%) within the prescribed 30 working day timescales, with an average of 22.7 working days and a range of four to 32 working days. This is a less good performance than in 2018, when the average timescale was 17.7 working days, and no cases exceeded the 30 working day target.

CEDR's average time to acknowledge complaints was two working days, although three cases took three working days. Last year, all complaints were acknowledged within one working day.

For a Service with so few complaints I would expect POSTRS to do a little better; and whilst these results do not warrant a formal recommendation I urge CEDR to keep an eye on performance so that timescale targets do not slip further.

(ii) Casework and Outcomes (1 July to 31 December 2019)

For this review I examined the three complaints received between 1 July and 31 December 2019. Please see my interim report for a qualitative analysis of those complaints received during the first half of the year.

Classifications and outcomes were all correct in my view, and replies to complainants were of a high standard.

The fully in scope complaint boiled down to POSTRS erroneously rejecting a customer's original claim, when the claim was in fact eligible for adjudication. The reason (which was explained well in the reply to the complainant) was an administrative error, whereby POSTRS should have sought clarification about some missing documentation. The complaint was fully upheld, and CEDR gave the customer £50.00 compensation, which in my view was proportionate.

Both partly in scope complaints were upheld in part. The first was mostly about the adjudication decision, but there was a minor administrative omission in respect of when the complainant was notified of the decision. This had no bearing on the outcome, however CEDR gave the customer £10.00 compensation.

The second partly in scope complaint concerned ease of use of the on-line portal and the customer receiving conflicting advice about what to do. In the event it transpired that somehow two claims had been opened, which confused matters and led to a delay in one part of the process. CEDR gave the complainant £25.00 compensation, which was gratefully accepted.

(iii) Stage 3 Review

I reviewed one case in 2019. The complainant had conflated two issues - one of which concerned a complaint about a different Service altogether. I reviewed both issues, but here I comment only on the POSTRS element.

In summary, the complainant was seeking a substantial amount of compensation in relation to a multitude of alleged problems with mail delivery and did not like the decision the adjudicator reached. CEDR rightly ruled these matters outwith the complaints procedure, which I supported in my review. That said, I stepped outside the strict confines of my remit and briefly examined the customer's suggestion that the adjudicator hadn't considered all the documentation - and I found clear evidence to the contrary.

The complainant also said that CEDR hadn't noted comments made in a call to them, and that CEDR hadn't returned certain documents as requested. I found clear evidence to the contrary.

The only minor failing that I found (and it was very minor) was a slightly delayed call back to the customer at one stage, which CEDR apologised for in the Stage 1 and 2 reviews. However, I felt that in recognition of the slight inconvenience that might have been caused a small goodwill payment was warranted, so I awarded £10.00.

My review of this complaint gave me no cause for concern in respect of POSTRS generally.

6. Conclusion

In the context of POSTRS' overall volume of claims in 2019 the frequency of complaints about its own service levels remains low (at 1.0%). As in previous years, this is evidence of a sustained good performance.

Complaints were correctly classified, and outcomes were in my view fair; replies to consumers that I looked at were of a consistently high standard, for which POSTRS is to be commended.

There was a slight deterioration in the time taken both to acknowledge complaints and to complete the Stage 1 reviews - nothing terrible, just not quite as good as last year. I make no formal recommendation on this for the time being, but I would urge CEDR to seek to improve timescale performance. I'll monitor the position in my next report.

7. 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 review as I saw fit. I am very 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



Independent Complaint Reviewer

18 February 2020