

Postal Redress Service (POSTRS): Independent Complaint Reviewer Interim Report January - June 2020.

1. Introduction

This is my seventh 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 2020.

The Coronavirus pandemic had a significant impact during this period, and I'm mindful of the disruption to POSTRS' and CEDR's (the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution) operations. The office was closed from late March onwards with staff working from home and there have no doubt been potentially challenging demands from customers. Against this backdrop I have been impressed with the overall standard of complaint handling maintained by CEDR; and I commend their success in maintaining continuity of service throughout. I have also taken into account the extraordinary circumstances of the last few months when assessing CEDR's complaint handling performance.

2. My Role

I am an independent consultant. I 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 reference¹ and the rules of the Service² I can only 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 can't comment on the content or validity of the Service's rules.

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

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

I can review cases where users of the Service have complained to POSTRS and/or CEDR and, having been through CEDR's complaint process, remain dissatisfied with the outcome of their 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 review complaints about the Service as a whole and produce reports accordingly. These are based on my findings when I review individual complaints; together with my examination and analysis as I see fit of all or some of the service complaints that POSTRS have handled.

3. CEDR's Complaints Procedure

The procedure³ covers POSTRS and explains its scope 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 2 of the process, where a senior staff member (usually a Director) will review the complaint. Where this doesn't resolve the matter, the complaint can be referred to me for independent review.

4. This Report

I have examined all the service complaints received by POSTRS between 1 January and 30 June 2020. One complaint was referred to me during this period, which I comment on in the next section.

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

5. My Findings

(a) Quantitative

With relentless consistency, POSTRS continues to receive a very low number of complaints about the level of service it provides. It handled 285 claims during this reporting period, giving rise to three complaints about POSTRS itself (two of which were from the same customer). This is about 1% - the same proportion as the 2019 calendar year. This is statistically insignificant.

Of the 285 claims handled, 43% (123) received a final decision from an adjudicator. The remaining 57% were either outside POSTRS' scope, or were settled without the need to progress to an adjudicator. This is a change from the 2019 full year position, when the respective proportions were 61% and 39%.

Of the 123 adjudicated cases, POSTRS found wholly for the complainant in 0.8% (1) of cases; 13.0% (16) partly for the complainant; and 86.2% (106) wholly for the postal operator. The respective proportions for 2019 were a bit different at 1.4%; 6.9%; and 91.7%. However, the relatively small numbers can make the percentage movements seem unduly large; and what these figures show is that overall fewer claims were found for the postal operator during this reporting period than the one before.

Commentary on claims and their outcomes is beyond my remit; I include these figures simply to give the context in which to view complaints made about POSTRS itself. That said, the figures are not wildly out of line with my previous reports. And, as has been the case in the past, even though successful claims aren't common there were only three 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: Acceptance/non acceptance of complaints

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

One case was incorrectly classified as "out of scope", when it should have been "partly in 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 cases that were “partly in scope”:

Table 2

Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not Upheld	Total
0	2	1	3

These are very low numbers. It is not possible to identify any trends or themes but I found no evidence of any systemic or underlying issues.

(b) Qualitative

(i) Timescales

POSTRS handled all three cases at Stage 1 within 30 working days, with an average of 19 and a range of five to 30 working days.

One complaint was escalated, with the Stage 2 and Stage 3 responses both meeting their 30 working day timescales (at 21 and 13 working days respectively).

Acknowledgements took an average of two and a half working days with a range of one to four working days. Given the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic I’m not too concerned by this; but as things return to a more steady state I would urge CEDR to improve this area of performance. I mentioned it in my last report and it’s still the case that for a Service with so few complaints I’d expect POSTRS to do a bit better. However, I am not making a formal recommendation this time.

(ii) Casework and Outcomes

I am satisfied that the correct outcomes were reached on all three complaints (which were all “partly in scope”). CEDR made goodwill payments in two cases - one of which I cover in section (iii) below; the other was for £30.00 in respect of a processing error, which I considered to be a fair and proportionate outcome.

The overall standard of CEDR’s replies to complainants was good. Two of the three complaints were from the same person. One of these was referred to me, and CEDR’s response to the other one was particularly good. I found it to be comprehensive, detailed, and explanatory - and it offered to consider further information from the complainant if there was any.

(iii) Stage 2 and 3 Reviews

One case was referred to me after the customer rejected the Stage 2 response. The original complaint was about the customer receiving less compensation than awarded (albeit by a very small amount); an unanswered question about the postal service; and CEDR not replying to an email. There were subsequent complaints about not escalating the complaint; and the customer not being sent the complaints procedure.

It turned out that the compensation discrepancy was down to a typographical error; that there were some administration errors on CEDR's part; and that there had been a perceived delay in escalation when, in fact, CEDR were in all good faith trying hard to resolve the complaint with minimum hassle to the customer.

I found that the Stage 1 review gave a reasonable response (including making good the compensation underpayment as well as offering £20.00 by way of goodwill) but that it could perhaps have gone a bit further in terms of explanation. However, the Stage 2 response was excellent and dealt with everything openly and honestly - and it increased the goodwill offer significantly. In summary, I found nothing amiss with the handling of the matter so I did not uphold the complaint - but I did recommend that CEDR make the payment offered at Stage 2.

It's rare for me to get a complaint about POSTRS, but I was pleased to see both the customer being offered what I considered to be a very fair outcome and the process itself working effectively at all stages.

6. Conclusion

Complaints about POSTRS' quality of service remain infrequent, and they are consistently low as a proportion of the Service's total workload. This consistency reassures me that CEDR/POSTRS is maintaining good complaints handling service levels; and the evidence from my review points to a resilient performance, especially considering the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic.

As things settle, I'd urge POSTRS to make sure that they acknowledge all complaints within a maximum of two working days. I'm not minded to make a formal recommendation on this for the moment; however, I will do so if my full year review suggests one is necessary.

7. Recommendations

I have no recommendations.

Acknowledgements

Even though I conducted this review remotely, CEDR provided me with the same level of open and unrestricted access to all the systems and records that I needed just as if I'd been in their offices. I am very grateful for the efforts that they went to in order to set this up for me securely, and for giving me technical support as required. As usual, I therefore had carte blanche in respect of conducting this audit as I saw fit.

I have also had the usual high level of assistance with any queries that came up as I conducted my review and I appreciate in particular the responses from the Head of Consumer Services and the Complaints Manager to the occasional points that I raised as I examined the casework.

Chris Holland

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

Independent Complaint Reviewer

12 August 2020