

Postal Redress Service (POSTRS): Independent Complaint Reviewer Interim Report January - June 2021.

1. Introduction

This is my ninth report on POSTRS - which deals with disputes between postal operators who are members of the Service and their customers. This report covers 1 January to 30 June 2021.

The impact of the Coronavirus pandemic continues. CEDR's (the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution) office has been closed since late March 2020, with staff working from home. Although they have now had a long period to get used to this way of working, I remain mindful of the ongoing challenges to POSTRS' and CEDR's operations.

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.

I can review cases where users of the Service have complained and, having been through CEDR's complaints procedure, remain dissatisfied with the outcome. 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 every six months. These are based on my examination and analysis of the service complaints received by POSTRS, together with any cases that I've reviewed.

¹ <https://www.cedr.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Independent-Reviewer-TOR-v2.pdf>

² <https://www.cedr.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/POSTRS-rules-2017-v2.pdf>

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 manager 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 examined all the service complaints received by POSTRS between 1 January and 30 June 2021. No complaints were referred to me for review during this period; and there were no Stage 2 escalations.

5. My Findings

(a) Quantitative

As usual, POSTRS continues to receive a very low number of complaints. It handled 293 claims during this reporting period, of which three led to a complaint about POSTRS' quality of service. This is about 1%, the same as in 2020 (full year).

Of the 293 claims handled, 42% (124) received a final decision from an adjudicator. The remaining 58% were either outside POSTRS' scope, or were settled without the need to progress to an adjudicator. This is similar to the 2020 full year position, when the respective proportions were 40% and 60%.

Of the 124 adjudicated cases, POSTRS found wholly for the complainant in 2.4% (3) of the cases; 4.1% (5) partly for the complainant; and 93.5% (116) wholly for the postal operator.

The respective proportions in 2020 were 1.2%; 13.1%; and 85.7%. As ever, the small numbers can make percentage movements appear relatively large; however, the position is in line with what I'd expect historically.

³ <https://www.cedr.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CEDR-Complaints-Procedure-Apr21.pdf>

Commentary on claims and outcomes is not part of my remit and these figures simply provide the context in which to view complaints made about POSTRS. It's worth noting, however, that once again even though successful claims are rare there were only three complaints about POSTRS - suggesting that the Service is working well.

All three complaints were “out of scope” but for the sake of continuity I’m showing the breakdown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Acceptance/non acceptance of complaints

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

All cases were correctly classified.

There are no identifiable trends from such low numbers; and I found no evidence of any systemic or underlying issues.

(b) Qualitative

(i) Timescales

CEDR handled all three POSTRS complaints at Stage 1 within 30 working days, with an average of 12.3 working days and a range of four to 23 working days. This is better than in 2020, when the average was 17.5 working days and the range four to 30 working days.

Acknowledgements took an average of 1.3 working days, with nothing exceeding two working days. Again, this is an improvement on 2020 when the average was 2.6 working days.

(ii) Casework and Outcomes

I am satisfied that all three complaints were about the adjudication decision and thus correctly “out of scope.” In the first of these, the adjudicator upheld an objection by the postal operator because the claim related to someone different from the claimant; in the second, the customer made an entirely groundless compensation request because their claim failed; and in the third, the customer complained of a conflict of interest but refused to supply any details beyond that statement. I was pleased to see that CEDR dealt firmly but politely with one or two further emails from the customer concerned.

None of these complaints contained any elements of poor administration or poor quality of customer service.

In each case CEDR explained the scope of the complaints procedure and responded professionally to the points made by complainants. In my view CEDR's Stage 1 responses were of a high standard - including very good, succinct, summaries of the complaints.

6. Conclusion

At the risk of repeating my previous reports, complaints about POSTRS' quality of service remain very low. At three complaints out of 293 applications there isn't much more to say about the numbers.

I'm pleased to see that both the speed of acknowledgement and Stage 1 responses has improved; and I commend CEDR on the standard of its written communications to complainants.

7. Recommendations

I have no recommendations.

Acknowledgements

I conducted my review remotely, but had open and unrestricted access to the systems and records that I needed. I am very grateful to CEDR for facilitating this - and I had carte blanche in respect of conducting this audit as I saw fit.

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

Chris Holland



Independent Complaint Reviewer

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