

# **Postal Redress Service (POSTRS): Independent Complaint Reviewer Report For 2021.**

## **1. Introduction**

This is my tenth report on POSTRS (the Service) - which deals with disputes between postal operators who are members of the Service and their customers. Together with my interim report<sup>1</sup> of 21 July it covers the full calendar year 2021.

## **2. 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.

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

The second aspect of my role is to review complaints about the Service generally, and produce two reports a year. These are based on my findings from any individual complaints that I have reviewed; and by examining and analysing all or some of the service complaints about POSTRS as I see fit.

## **3. CEDR's Complaints Procedure**

CEDR's complaints procedure<sup>2</sup> covers POSTRS. It explains the scope of the procedure and the two internal review stages 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 will review the complaint. Where this does not resolve the matter, it can be referred to me for independent review.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cedr.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/POSTRS-interim-review-Jan-June-2021-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cedr.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CEDR-Complaints-Procedure-oct-21.pdf>

## **4. This Report**

My report reviews how well overall CEDR handled complaints about POSTRS in 2021. 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 dealt with the first half. No complaints were referred to me during 2021.

## **5. My Findings**

### **(a) Quantitative**

POSTRS received 650 applications in 2021, which is remarkably consistent with the 642 in the previous year.

CEDR received eight complaints about the Service, which is two more than last year and represents 1.2% of applications. This compares to 1.1% in 2020 – so the proportion is pretty much the same.

Of the 650 total applications handled in 2021, 52% (336) received a final decision from an adjudicator. The remaining 48% were either outside POSTRS' investigative scope, or were settled without progressing to adjudication. This is a move from the previous year, when the respective percentages were 40% and 60%. In other words, more claims went to adjudication in 2021. This reverses the recent trend.

Of the 336 adjudicated claims, POSTRS found wholly for the claimant in two cases (0.6%); partly for the claimant in 24 cases (7.1%); and wholly for the postal operator in 310 cases (92.3%). Comparative proportions for 2020 were 1.2%, 13.1% and 85.7% – showing an increase in claims found for the postal operator.

It's not my role to comment on claims and their outcomes, and I include these data for contextual purposes only.

Although the vast majority of claims were found in favour of the postal operator, there were very few complaints about POSTRS itself. This suggests that the Service's quality of customer service is good.

Table 1 below gives a breakdown of the service complaints about POSTRS for 2021:

Table 1

In Scope	Partly in Scope	Out of Scope	Total
2	1	5	8

I found four classification errors, three of which occurred in the second half of the year. CEDR have corrected these, and the table above shows the accurate position.

Classification accuracy arose in my report on CEDR's Communications and Internet Services Adjudication Scheme (CISAS). I recommended they take action accordingly so, given that CEDR are well aware of the issue, I see no need to repeat that recommendation for POSTRS.

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	1	1	3

All outcomes were classified correctly.

I found no identifiable trends from such small numbers.

## **(b) Qualitative**

### **(i) Timescales (2021 full year)**

Average complaint handling times stayed the same year on year and were well within target; acknowledgment speed improved significantly.

The average Stage 1 completion time in 2021 was 17.5 working days, the same as in 2020. There was however a noticeable difference between the first half of this year and the second, where the performance was 12.3 working days and 22.8 working days respectively.

The range during 2021 was four to 32 working days.

CEDR's average time to acknowledge complaints was one working day compared to 2.6 working days in 2020.

**(ii) Casework and Outcomes (1 July to 31 December 2021)**

I examined the five complaints received between 1 July and 31 December 2021. (My interim report provides an analysis of the three complaints received during the first half of the year.)

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

Two complaints were in scope.

The first, which CEDR upheld in full, was from a very elderly customer concerning a lack of response to his queries and problems with using the on-line claim form. POSTRS had responded to the customer before a formal complaint was made, but he struggled to understand the "jargon". CEDR's Stage 1 response was excellent, and gave an empathic account of what had happened. There had been an oversight in responding to the customer's initial queries, which CEDR admitted was a service failing and they awarded £20.00 compensation. They investigated the on-line claim form issue but found no problems; and they explained the various things that the customer hadn't understood. The customer wrote back to CEDR saying: "My thanks for your email. It was a rare treat to see such an excellent response."

CEDR did not uphold the second complaint, which was about a delay in issuing the decision on a claim and an allegation that POSTRS lied about the reason. The Stage 1 response was very good. It acknowledged that there had indeed been a slight delay as a new adjudicator had to be allocated due to unforeseen circumstances; but it provided evidence that the customer had been contacted on the same day and advised of what had happened. At that point (before the formal complaint came in) the customer was offered and accepted £30.00 by way of a goodwill payment for the delay. If anything, this strikes me as on the generous side and I could not see why the customer went on to complain unless it was to seek further monetary gain.

One complaint was partly in scope.

This was a lengthy complaint, which CEDR upheld in part. In a nutshell, before making a formal complaint the customer (who said he had limited internet access and was seeking a telephone appointment to make comments on the postal operator's defence on a claim) had been in touch with CEDR's Head of Consumer Services about a number of

issues. I shall not rehearse them here, save to say that CEDR seemed to me to have been very accommodating – offering an extension to the process in favour of the customer along with a £50.00 goodwill payment for any administrative confusion. POSTRS had explained the process to the customer but he seemed to be trying to circumvent it and was making numerous calls to POSTRS to the extent that they advised him of their Unacceptable Behaviour Policy. (This is in place to protect staff from, inter alia: aggression; abuse; threats; harassment, excessive levels of contact; and unreasonable demands.)

The subsequent formal complaint contained a litany of issues – much of which was to do with the adjudication and therefore out of scope. There were some service issues but these, to my mind, had largely been dealt with previously. The Stage 1 response was again very good. In essence, it verified that the customer had received a number of calls from POSTRS at agreed times; reviewed the relevant calls; explained the process in the context of the customer's claim; and pointed out that in effect the complaint had already been upheld in part and no further compensation was warranted on top of the £50.00 that the customer had accepted. This was the correct outcome in my view, and I commend CEDR for their patience in dealing with the matter.

Two complaints were out of scope.

The first was a clear case of the claimant being unhappy with the outcome of the adjudication decision. In the second, the customer had not given the postal operator an opportunity to resolve the matter. There were no customer service issues involved in either case.

No complaints were escalated to Stage 2 of the procedure.

## **6. Conclusion**

As has been the case in recent years, I'm satisfied that CEDR's performance in respect of handling complaints about POSTRS is very good. In the context of POSTRS' total claims in 2021 the frequency of service complaints remains low at 1.2%.

Stage 1 responses were consistently of a high standard, for which I commend CEDR.

In my view CEDR need to sharpen up the accuracy of complaint classification – four errors out of eight cases over the year isn't good. However, I'm not making a recommendation on this as CEDR are already taking steps following my report on CISAS.

Acknowledgement timescales improved on 2020 and at an average of one working day were excellent. Stage 1 replies were well within target over the year, but took longer on average in the second half of the year.

## **7. Recommendations**

I have no recommendations.

## **Acknowledgements**

I conducted my review remotely and I'm again grateful to CEDR for facilitating this with the necessary technical support. I've had open and unrestricted access to all the systems and records that I needed so, as usual, have had carte blanche in respect of conducting this audit as I saw fit. I've also had the customary high level of assistance with the various 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 points that I raised as I examined the casework.

Chris Holland



Independent Complaint Reviewer  
7 February 2022