

# Customer Charter

March 2023

## Welcome

Welcome to the Labour Relations Agency's Customer Charter. This Charter is for you. In it you will find out about the standards you can expect from us when you use any of our services.

We also want to hear from you about what you think of our Charter and our services. This document will tell you how to provide feedback to us.

## What the Agency does

We promote good employment practice and we advise on rights and responsibilities. We have a range of services designed to help you. You might need to find out about good employment practices or maybe you need assistance with writing policies and procedures and how to use them. We can help you with all of this. If you are experiencing some problems at work, our dispute resolution services can help you deal with these effectively.

Every service we provide is free and confidential. We are impartial and will assist everyone who needs our help.

## Who are our customers?

We are here for employees and employers, and their respective representatives, in Northern Ireland.

## Our commitment to you

- We will put our customers first.
- We will strive to meet or exceed the standards we have set ourselves.
- We will listen to your feedback and act on it as appropriate.
- We will challenge ourselves to be the best that we can be.

## What we need from you

- Treat our staff with respect and be polite.
- Comply with our security requirements when you visit us.
- Be open and honest in your discussions with us.
- Provide information we ask for by the date we need it.
- Provide feedback on our services anytime you wish and by completing our evaluation surveys, so that we can continually improve to address your needs and meet your expectations.

## Standards we can measure

### When you visit us

- We will meet you within five minutes of your appointment time

- If you do not have an appointment time we will try to meet you within 15 minutes of your arrival

### When you write to us

- We will make an initial response within five working days of receipt of your letter

### If you make a Freedom of Information request

- We will give you the information you request within 20 working days or tell you when to expect the information if we need more time

### If you make a Complaint

- We will acknowledge it within 3 working days

### Workplace Information Service

- The average call waiting time will be less than one minute

### Early Conciliation

- When we have received your Early Conciliation notification one of our Conciliation Officers will contact you, usually within five working days

### Individual Conciliation

- If an employer contacts us wishing to use our conciliation service before a complaint has been lodged to a tribunal, we will respond within five days of receipt of the request
- If an employee contacts us wishing to use our conciliation service before they lodge a complaint to a tribunal, we will make contact with them within five days of receiving their request

### Collective Conciliation

- When we receive a request for collective conciliation we will normally respond on the day of receipt

## Our general corporate standards

### We will be accessible to you –

- Our services will be available to employees, employers, and their respective representatives in Northern Ireland
- We will treat you with respect and courtesy and embrace and value diversity
- We will quickly identify your needs and advise how we may be able to help

### We will communicate with you effectively

- We will keep our website-up-to-date
- We will ensure you understand any information you are provided with

- We will use a range of communications channels
- We will aim to respond to all media queries within 24 hours

#### When you phone us

- We will take your call between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm Monday – Friday (excluding Public and Bank Holidays)
- If someone is not available, you can leave a voicemail message or we will take a message
- We will identify ourselves by name
- We will be courteous and polite

#### When you visit us

- We will make a meeting room available
- We will meet you within five minutes of your appointment time
- If you do not have an appointment time we will try to meet you within 15 minutes of your arrival

#### When you write to us

- We will respond in a clear and concise manner
- We will include a member of staff's name and business area in our response
- We will make an initial response within five working days of receipt of your letter

#### If you make a Freedom of Information request

- We will give you the information you request within 20 working days or tell you when to expect the information if we need more time

#### If you make a complaint

- We will follow our complaints procedure
- We will assess how we can improve our service based on your complaint

## Service standards and targets

#### Advisory Services

- We will ensure our new online employment document toolkit is maintained to a high standard with access to template documents, up-to-date resources on good employment practice and guidance on contemporary themes

- Our public events programme, offering a mix of online and in-person sessions is up and running again. We continue to grow and improve our digital offering, with a number of new pre-recorded webinars and podcasts available on our website.
- We will ensure content for those guides reviewed as part of the nibusinessinfo.co.uk website promotes best practice across the range of employment issues and includes up-to-date information on legislative developments
- We are keen to continually improve our services and welcome feedback through our website or completion of evaluation surveys following 'live' events.

#### Workplace Information Service

- The average call waiting time will be less than one minute
- If the service is unavailable we will have a recorded message stating why and when it will be available again

#### Early Conciliation

- If you wish to make a claim to the Tribunal, you must notify us first to discuss Early Conciliation as this might resolve your complaint
- When we have received your Early Conciliation notification one of our Conciliation Officers will contact you, usually within five working days
- Our Conciliation Officer will explain how conciliation works and offer it to you
- If you give your consent, our Conciliation Officer will then contact the other party to ask if they are willing to agree to conciliation
- If both parties agree, our Conciliation Officer will try to find a solution both sides can accept, which would avoid the need for a Tribunal hearing
- If you or the other party do not want to use conciliation, or if settlement is not reached within the one-month period available for Early Conciliation, we will give you a certificate to confirm that you have considered Early Conciliation; the certificate will have a unique reference number which the Tribunal office will need if you want to take your case to a Tribunal

#### Individual Conciliation

- If you make a claim to the Tribunal, we will offer direct discussions with each party involved (Conciliation) – these discussions are usually by telephone
- When the Agency receives a copy of an ET1 claim form or ET3 response form from the Tribunal, the Conciliation Officer will confirm receipt and offer conciliation by letter or email
- If there are difficulties with communication by telephone or where a case is particularly sensitive or complicated, we will offer face-to-face meetings with any party involved using videoconferencing or telephone
- We will provide interpreters where required, to assist with the conciliation process

- We will have a Conciliation Officer available to contact you by telephone to assist with any queries on cases or to facilitate settlements for parties attending case management discussions or hearings at the Tribunal
- If an employer contacts us wishing to use our conciliation service before a complaint has been lodged to a tribunal, we will respond within five days of receipt of the request
- If an employee contacts us wishing to use our conciliation service before they lodge a complaint to a tribunal, we will make contact with them within five days of receiving their request

#### Collective Conciliation

- When we receive a request for collective conciliation we will respond on the day of receipt
- If an outcome is reached by the parties, we will prepare the document on the day and facilitate signing of it by the parties

#### Mediation

- We will provide a safe environment where you can discuss your concerns and issues
- We will not pass any judgement or make any determinations on who is right or wrong
- We will treat all information discussed in a mediation as completely confidential
- We will work with you to explore underlying issues
- We will encourage you to listen to one another
- We will work with you to evaluate all available options and work towards realistic, manageable and agreed outcomes
- We will help you explore strategies to assist and strengthen your working relationship within the workplace
- We will help you develop an action plan and/or a memorandum of understanding for agreement

#### Arbitration

- We can offer arbitration to try to settle a dispute when conciliation has not been successful
- We can offer arbitration when it is included as the final stage of negotiating procedures
- We can offer arbitration to resolve a dispute instead of you going to a tribunal; this is our Arbitration Scheme
- Our Arbitration Secretary will make arrangements for arbitration hearings including any reasonable adjustments identified by the participants
- If parties organise arbitrations themselves we can pass their details on to their chosen arbitrator
- We will provide a private environment at our Head Office in Belfast and Regional Office in Derry/Londonderry, for all arbitration hearings
- Arbitration hearings are confidential, quick, informal and cheaper than going to a tribunal
- You can bring a representative, advisor and sometimes a witness to help you present your case
- In some arbitrations where the decision may not be legally binding, it is expected that the parties will accept and implement the decision
- With our Arbitration Scheme the arbitrator's decision is called an 'award' and it is final and legally binding with an appeal or challenge only available in certain circumstances

## Independent Appeals

- We provide an independent appeal service to some public sector and other sector organisations when there is a collective agreement between an employer and its recognised trade union
- We facilitate the setting-up and delivery of the hearing
- We will provide a private environment at our headquarters in Belfast and regional office in Derry/Londonderry, for all independent appeal hearings
- Your internal procedure will tell you who you can bring to the hearing, usually a trade union representative or a colleague
- The independent appeal decision may be legally binding
- Parties are obliged to accept and implement the decision and recommendations

### Doing our best for you

We want to be the best that we can be for you. We will always welcome any comments, suggestions or even complaints that you might have about us and our services. Please contact us by emailing ([CustomerComplaints@lra.org.uk](mailto:CustomerComplaints@lra.org.uk)), telephoning, writing or using our online complaints form (click [here](#)):

<b>Head Office</b>  2-4 Cromac Avenue, The Gasworks Belfast BT7 2JA  03300 552 220 <a href="mailto:info@lra.org.uk">info@lra.org.uk</a>	<b>Regional Office</b> 3 <sup>rd</sup> Floor Richmond Chambers The Diamond Derry/Londonderry BT48 6HN  03300 552 220 <a href="mailto:info@lra.org.uk">info@lra.org.uk</a>
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## **Data Protection and Privacy**

All personal contact details, written submissions and decisions are treated as confidential and are retained in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation. Disposal is carried out using a confidential shredding service.

The Agency has security and confidentiality policies and a Code of Conduct in place that all our staff must follow. We are audited regularly and are examined independently to make sure we have the highest standards of data and information management.