

Stone Chambers' Complaints Procedure

Updated October 2010

1. Our aim is to give you an excellent service at all times. However, in the unlikely event that you wish to make a complaint, you are invited to let us know as soon as possible. It is not necessary to involve solicitors in order to make your complaint but you are free to do so should you wish.
2. Please note that:
 - a. The Legal Ombudsman, the independent complaints body for service complaints about lawyers, has a twelve-month time limit from the date of the act or omission about which you are complaining within which to make your complaint. Chambers must therefore have regard to that timeframe when deciding whether they are able to investigate your complaint. Chambers will not deal with complaints that fall outside this time limit.
 - b. This Complaints Procedure is not suitable for dealing with complaints involving allegations of negligence (in which case you should seek independent legal advice) or professional misconduct (in which case you should refer the matter to the Bar Standards Board, whose contact details are available at www.barstandardsboard.org.uk).

Complaints Made by Telephone

3. You may wish to make a complaint in writing and, if so, please follow the procedure in paragraph 4 and 5 below. However, if you would rather speak on the telephone about your complaint then please telephone our senior clerk J-P Schulz, or, (if the complaint is about Mr Schulz) Elizabeth Blackburn QC. The person you contact will make a note of the details of your complaint. They will discuss your concerns, what you would like to happen to resolve the situation and try to bring them to a satisfactory conclusion. If the matter is resolved they will confirm you are satisfied with the outcome and, if you are, record that outcome. You may also wish to record the conclusion of the telephone discussion in writing.
4. If your complaint is not resolved on the telephone you will be invited to write to us about it within the next 14 days so it can be investigated formally.

Complaints made in Writing

5. Please give the following details:
 - Your name and address;
 - Which member(s) of Chambers you are complaining about;
 - The detail of the complaint; and
 - What you would like to happen to resolve the situation.

Please address your letter to:

Jean-Pierre Schulz (or, if the complaint relates to Mr Schulz, Elizabeth Blackburn QC)
Stone Chambers
4 Field Court
Gray's Inn
London WC1R 5EF

We will, where possible, acknowledge receipt of your complaint within two days and provide you with details of how your complaint will be dealt with.

6. Our Chambers has a panel headed by Elizabeth Blackburn QC and made up of another member of Chambers and a senior member of staff, which considers any written complaint. Within 14 days of your letter being received the head of the panel or her deputy in her absence will appoint a member of the panel to investigate it. If your complaint is against the head of the panel, the next most senior member of the panel will investigate it. In any case, the person appointed will be someone other than the person you are complaining about.
7. The person appointed to investigate will write to you as soon as possible to let you know he has been appointed and that he will reply to your complaint within 14 days. If he finds later that he is not going to be able to reply within 14 days he will set a new date for his reply and inform you. His reply will set out:
 - The nature and scope of his investigation;
 - His conclusion on each complaint and the basis for his conclusion; and
 - If he finds that you are justified in your complaint, his proposals for resolving the complaint.

Confidentiality

8. All conversations and documents relating to the complaint will be treated as confidential and will be disclosed only to the extent that is necessary. Disclosure will be to the head of Chambers, members of our management committee and to anyone involved in the complaint and its investigation. Such people will include the barrister member or staff who you have complained about, the head or relevant senior member of the panel and the person who investigates the complaint. The Bar Standards Board is entitled to inspect the documents and seek information about the complaint when discharging its auditing and monitoring functions.

Our Policy

9. As part of our commitment to client care we make a written record of any complaint and retain all documents and correspondence generated by the complaint for a period of six years. Our management committee inspects an anonymised record regularly with a view to improving services.

Complaints to the Legal Ombudsman

10. If you are unhappy with the outcome of our investigation you may take up your complaint with the Legal Ombudsman, the independent complaints body for complaints about lawyers, at the conclusion of our consideration of your complaint. The Ombudsman is not able to consider your complaint until it has first been investigated by Chambers. Please note that the Legal Ombudsman has a twelve-month time limit from the date of the act or omission about which you are complaining within which to make your complaint. You can write to them at:

Legal Ombudsman
PO Box 15870,
Birmingham B30 9EB

Telephone number: 0300 555 0333
Email: enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk
Web: www.legalombudsman.org.uk