

Customer Charter

Updated October 2020

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.

Covid-19

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, we are continuing to offer our full range of services. However, given our priority to keep our customers and staff safe, we have made some changes to the way we deliver some of our services. Our offices are closed for the foreseeable future and all our staff are working effectively from home, so the services we normally provide in our offices are now being delivered using telephone or video conferencing.

Due to the impact of Covid-19, demand, both for our Workplace Information Service and Early Conciliation telephone line for notifications, is higher than normal. Please do keep trying to get through so that we can help with your query.

We do not have an opening date as yet but are working hard to ensure that our offices are ready to welcome you back in a safe way.

What the Agency does

We promote good employment practice and 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 do not take sides 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.

Our general corporate standards

We will be accessible to you

- Our services will be available to those who need them in Northern Ireland
- We will endeavour to meet the needs and preferences of customers
- We will make access to our offices easy for disabled users
- We will consider requests for information in alternative formats

We will communicate with you effectively

- We will keep our website clear and up-to-date
- We will make our information as accessible as possible if you have visual impairment or if English is not your first language
- We will make our information clear and easy to read
- We will provide information in a variety of formats
- We will use a range of communications channels to suit your needs and preferences.
- We will aim to respond to all media queries within 15 minutes
- When you ask us for information we will check that what we give you is what you need

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

- Employment-related documents will be reviewed within three calendar months from when we receive them
- While our events are not running in person, we will ensure that our most popular seminars are available as webinars on our website

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
- If you lodge a case with the tribunal office which is not about discrimination **or** if you are a respondent for a case that has been lodged and it is not about discrimination, one of our Conciliation Officers will contact you no later than four working weeks from when they receive the case
- If you lodge a case with the tribunal office which is about discrimination **or** if you are a respondent for a case that has been lodged and it is about discrimination, one of our Conciliation Officers will contact you when they receive the employer's response to the claim (the ET3 form)
- Our Conciliation Officers will make up to three attempts to contact individuals and employers by telephone, 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), telephoning, writing or using our online complaints form (click [here](#)):

Head Office 2-16 Gordon Street Belfast BT1 2LG 03300 552 220 info@lra.org.uk	Regional Office 3 rd Floor Richmond Chambers The Diamond Derry/Londonderry BT48 6HN 03300 552 220 info@lra.org.uk
---	---

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.