

The Pension Service

Our Service Standards

September 2010



Part of the Department for Work and Pensions

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Introduction

The Pension Service is part of the Department for Work and Pensions. We can tell you about pensions and benefits whether you are:

- planning your retirement
- about to retire, or
- already retired.

We are committed to improving services for older people and helping people to plan for their later years.

Our responsibilities to you

We want to give you the best possible service when you contact us. We want you to be happy with the information we give you and the way we treat you.

Right treatment

We aim to treat all our customers in the same way.

We will:

- be friendly, fair and helpful
- treat you with respect
- behave professionally
- respect your privacy.

Right result

We aim to give you accurate information and the right advice to help you:

- get the pensions or benefits you're entitled to
- understand the conditions of receiving your pension or benefit

- understand our decisions, and
- decide what to do next.

On time

We aim to make sure we deliver our services as quickly as we can. This includes:

- processing your application as quickly as possible
- changing any of your details when you ask us to, and letting you know if the change affects your pension or benefit
- calling you back at the time we have agreed with you, and
- being on time for an appointment we have made with you.

Easy access

We want to make sure you can access our services easily. We will:

- tell you about other services that may help you
- give you the service you need, taking account of any disability or language problems you have
- offer you different ways of getting access to our services such as telephone or the internet, and
- try to direct you to the right place if we can't help.

What we expect from you

We've explained our responsibilities to you, but there are also things we expect from you in return.

You can help make our service more pleasant by:

- treating our staff with respect
- being considerate and polite.

You can also help by:

- keeping any appointments you have with us, and
- telling us if you need to communicate with us in a different way, for example, Braille, large print or through an interpreter.

Telling us when something changes

When you are getting pensions or benefits and your circumstances change you must tell us straight away.

For example, tell us if you:

- move house
- change the account we pay your pension or benefit into, or
- become ill or go into hospital.

Getting information on the internet

You may be able to find an answer to your question by visiting **www.direct.gov.uk/pensions** where you will see information about our range of services. For example, you can find out how to:

- get a State Pension Forecast
- claim your State Pension, or
- get a Pension Credit estimate.

You may also find the online benefit adviser service useful. You can use it to check whether you or someone you know is entitled to a range of benefits. It's easy – you just answer some simple questions anonymously. For details, go to

www.direct.gov.uk/benefitsadviser

When you phone us

We aim to answer phone calls within 45 seconds and will always tell you who you are speaking to. As the security of your personal details is important to us, we will ask you some security questions if this will help us deal with your enquiry.

We record phone calls to help us provide an accurate and consistent service and for training and security.

To help minimise the cost of calling us, we now offer some freephone or local-rate numbers, but we can call you back if you are concerned about the cost of the call or if we can't answer your question right away.

If we can't help you, we will try to direct you to the right place for help.

When you write to us

If you send us your enquiry by letter, we aim to give you a full reply within 10 working days of receiving it.

If you contact us by email, we will acknowledge receiving it straight away and aim to send a full reply within 10 working days. To keep your personal details secure, we won't include them in replies we send by email.

If we can't give a full reply to your letter or email within 10 working days, we will tell you why and when you can expect a full reply.

If you feel we have not given you the best possible service and you wish to make a complaint, you can find details in the 'When things go wrong' section of this leaflet.

Local Service

We provide a face-to-face service for our customers who are unable to access our services in any other way. In these circumstances our Local Service staff can:

- visit you in your UK home, or
- if you prefer, arrange to meet you at a convenient place close to your home.

If we need to visit you in your own home, we will:

- try to offer you a date within 10 working days
- contact you beforehand to arrange the date and let you know whether it will be morning or afternoon
- tell you if there are any documents you need to have available
- send someone of the same sex as you, if you prefer
- always show you an identity card when we visit you
- try to let you know if we are going to be late, and
- arrange for an interpreter to come to the interview if:
 - you have hearing or speech difficulties, or
 - English is not your preferred language.

If you prefer, you can:

- use your own interpreter
- arrange to have a friend, relative or carer with you when we visit.

Tell us what you think

At the Pension Service we always aim to provide a high level of customer service.

We welcome all your comments, complaints or ideas for things we could improve. Your feedback helps us look at what we do and how we do it better.

When things go right

If you think we have done something well, please tell us. Knowing that we have got it right for you may help us get it right for others.

We're always looking for new ways to improve our services. If you have an idea that could help us do this, please let us know.

If things go wrong

If you feel we have not given you the best possible service, it's important to let us know.

We can sort out most complaints if you simply tell us about the problem.

If you are not happy with something we have done, or if you think we have not done something we should have, please let us know.

How to contact us

You can tell us when things go right or wrong by:

- calling us on **0845 60 60 265** (phone) or **0845 60 60 285** (if you use a textphone) – a customer advisor will answer your call
- dialling **+44 191 218 7777** from abroad
- sending us your comments in writing. You can find the address on any of our letters
- completing the comment form at the back of this leaflet
- visiting Directgov at **www.direct.gov.uk/pensions**

Resolving complaints

We aim to resolve complaints and put things right straight away. At first your complaint will be considered by the pension centre dealing with your case. We will deal with your complaint in the best way for you. If you want us to use Braille, an audio CD or a large-print version when we contact you, please let us know.

We aim to respond to your complaint within seven working days of receiving it. If we cannot deal fully with your complaint by then, we will tell you why. We will let you know if there is anything you need to do and when you can expect a full response.

If you are still not satisfied

If you are not happy with the way we deal with your complaint and you want to take the matter further, you can register a complaint with the Pension Centre Manager by calling us on **0845 60 60 265** (phone) or **0845 60 60 285** (if you use a textphone) or, if calling from abroad, **+44 191 218 7777**.

If you are still not happy after you have received a reply from the Pension Centre Manager, you can write to the Chief Executive, The Pension Service, PO Box 50101, London SW1P 2WU. You will receive a reply within 15 working days.

The Chief Executive will not be able to look at your complaint until you have had a reply from the Pension Centre Manager.

Independent Case Examiner (ICE)

If, following a reply from the Chief Executive, you still think we have not dealt with your complaint properly you can contact the ICE. The ICE is independent of The Pension Service and the service is free.

Please do not contact them before or instead of contacting us about your complaint. This is because the ICE can only help after you have had the final reply from the Chief Executive. You must contact the ICE within six months of the date of the Chief Executive's reply to you.

The ICE can look at complaints about our service but not at matters of law or government policy.

To find out more, contact the Independent Case Examiner in writing at:

PO Box 155, Chester, CH99 9SA or by calling **0845 606 0777** (+44 151 801 8800 if calling from abroad).

Website: www.ind-case-exam.org.uk

Other help

You can also do the following:

- Ask for advice from an organisation like your local Age UK (previously known as Age Concern) or Citizens Advice.
- Contact a Member of Parliament (MP).

If you have tried to sort out your complaint with us but you are still not satisfied, your MP can refer your complaint to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. You can get more information by contacting:

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman
Millbank Tower
Millbank
London SW1P 4QP

Helpline: **0345 015 4033**

Calls to this number cost the same as a call to a UK landline.

The Helpline is open 8:30am to 5:30pm, Monday to Friday.

Website: **www.ombudsman.org.uk**

Special payments

We run a discretionary special payment scheme. It aims to return people to the financial position they would have been in, had we not made a mistake.

For more details, contact us on **0845 60 60 265** (phone), **0845 60 60 285** (if you use a textphone) or, if calling from abroad, **+44 191 218 7777**.

Call charges

Charges were correct as of the date on the back of this leaflet.

Calls to **0800** numbers are free from BT land lines and phone boxes but you may have to pay if you use another phone company, a mobile phone, or if you are calling from abroad. Calls to **0800** claim lines are free from mobile phones if you use one of the main mobile phone companies but can cost up to 40p per minute, so check the cost of calls with your service provider.

Calls to **0845** numbers from BT land lines should cost no more than 6p per minute with a 10p call set-up charge. You may have to pay more if you use another phone company or a mobile phone, or if you are calling from abroad. Calls from mobile phones can cost up to 40p per minute, so check the cost of calls with your service provider.

If you prefer, you can ask us to call you back. Tell our operator that this is what you want to do and give them your phone number.

Textphones

The textphone numbers we provide are for people who find it hard to speak or hear clearly. If you do not have a textphone, some libraries or citizens advice bureaux may have one. Textphones do not receive text messages from mobile phones.

Important information about this leaflet

This leaflet is only a guide and does not cover every circumstance. We have done our best to make sure that the information in this leaflet is correct as of September 2010. It is possible that some of the information is oversimplified, or may become inaccurate over time, for example because of changes to the law, our service standards, or call charges.

This leaflet is available in other formats

Call **0845 7 31 32 33** to find out more.

If you find it difficult to hear or to speak clearly, there is a textphone service available on **0845 604 0210** which you can use to order these leaflets.

You can also access this leaflet on the internet at:
www.dwp.gov.uk.

We're always looking for ways of improving the information we provide, so we would welcome any comments and suggestions you have. Please email them to us at:

leaflet.feedback@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

However, we can't answer any questions about benefits from this email address.

The Department for Work and Pensions aims to provide a high quality of service to all its customers. You can find out more on our Customer Charter at **www.direct.gov.uk/DWPCharter**

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Comment form

If you do not want a reply, you don't need to give us any of your personal details.

Your details

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

National Insurance number:

Date of birth:

How do you want us to reply to you?

Letter Phone E-mail Fax Do not reply

Please give us your address, phone number, e-mail address or fax number so we can reply to you in the way you want.

Special requirements

Please tell us about any special requirements we should bear in mind when we are dealing with you.

What is your comment?

- Complaint Enquiry
 Suggestion Compliment

Please write your comments in the space below.
(You may use an extra sheet of paper if you want.)

Would you like to take part in any future discussion groups or surveys about our service?

- Yes No

Please return this form to The Pension Service. You can find the address on letters we have sent you, at **www.direct.gov.uk/pensions**, or by phoning The Pension Service on **0845 60 60 265** (phone), **0845 60 60 285** (if you use a textphone) or, if calling from abroad, **+44 191 218 7777**

Thank you for contacting us.

Date received: