

Report from the
Independent Assessor
- Referrals 2025

**Report from the Independent
Assessor (IA) – referrals during 2025**

Independent Assessor Annual Report

March 2026

I am pleased to provide my Annual Report as Independent Assessor of service complaints for the Rail Ombudsman.

The role of Independent Assessor of the Rail Ombudsman is to consider complaints about the service that have not been resolved, or where a consumer remains dissatisfied with the Rail Ombudsman's response to their service complaint. It is not within the remit of the role to overturn decisions made by the Rail Ombudsman, nor how these outcomes were determined. Where complaints are escalated to the Independent Assessor, this is explained prior to any review taking place.

In 2025, a total of eleven cases were reviewed by the Independent Assessor. This represents 0.25% of the total number of cases raised to the Rail Ombudsman in the calendar year. It should be noted that I took up the appointment later in the year, and so the review reflects cases overseen not only by myself but also by my predecessors.

The Rail Ombudsman strives to provide consistently high levels of service, from the time it takes to resolve cases and the administration of them, through to the manner in which staff interact with passengers and representatives from the rail sector. While many cases are resolved through informal conciliation, it is natural for either party to be disappointed when a decision is required and it is not made in their favour. It should be emphasised that this does not always equate to a service issue however. The outcome of a case is distinct from the experience of how it has been managed by staff, and it is essential that concerns about the way the case was progressed are objectively separated from those about the award or decision.

That said, as with any organisation, there are times the levels of service the Rail Ombudsman aspires to are not met. Where this occurs, there appear to be well established feedback loops and process and training development pathways to ensure these learning opportunities are incorporated back into the service for the benefit of all future users. The Independent Assessor role is key to these activities.

The majority of complaints escalated to the Independent Assessor in 2025 were reviewed and found to have been handled in accordance with the relevant processes and ways of working.

Where this was not the case, recommendations were made to the Rail Ombudsman to ensure this would be rectified moving forwards. These included:

- Seeking insight from the Rail Ombudsman board and, subsequently, sector Rail Panels on how a particular type of objective evidence could be obtained in future cases.
- Outlining a concern to a Rail Service Provider in relation to their complaints process, and an amendment they could make to ensure it was more accessible.
- Obtaining further information from passengers when they open cases with the Rail Ombudsman on the nature of reasonable adjustments their circumstances require, and that these are understood by all staff.
- Undertaking a review of post-award work flows (referred to as Aftercare by the Rail Ombudsman) to ensure consistency of communication to consumers and to ensure reasonable expectations are set and then met by the Rail Ombudsman.
- Ensuring all calls to and from the Rail Ombudsman are recorded, unless there are clear and specified reasons not to, to ensure durable mediums of all communication channels.
- Complete assessment of all other parties within the travelling group when the passenger raises a case, where relevant.
- Amendments to the Rail ADR Service Rules and Eligibility Criteria in relation to case addendums and when these are required, the role of the ADR Service Board for complex cases, and case collation in particular circumstances and the processes that will be applied.

I should express my gratitude for the manner in which the passengers who escalated the cases I have reviewed I have engaged with me. They have provided clear and objective concerns, accepted the remit of my role, and helped improve the Rail Ombudsman's ways of working.

Equally, the engagement and support for my work from the Rail Ombudsman has been reassuring. Not only have recommendations been reviewed, but I have attended meetings with their representatives on a number of occasions. These explored the themes behind not only the cases that have been raised with me, but also the complaints that were raised with the Rail Ombudsman that are resolved without the need for escalation. Reviewing service failings and passenger expectations holistically in this manner ensures a deeper understanding of the drivers of dissatisfaction and how processes can be improved.

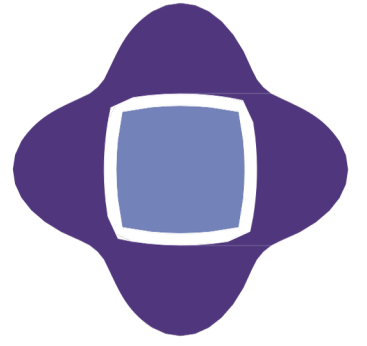
Further, I remain in contact with the Senior Leadership Team as required to discuss the findings from my reviews and underline the importance of improvements being realised in tangible ways, for the benefit of all users and staff. Again, it is reassuring to see and feel the enthusiasm and commitment there is to this, the culture of which appears to run through all representatives I have met with.

I would close by again drawing attention to the fact that only a very small proportion of cases the Rail Ombudsman manages lead to complaints about the service provided, and an even smaller proportion reach me. Over half of users of the service rate the overall experience as 'very' or 'fairly' good in the latest independent consumer experience monitoring, conducted by Ipsos and this proportion has increased on previous years. Whilst the Rail Ombudsman continues to seek to improve performance against this measure, consumer perceptions frequently shape assessments of both outcome and experience. That said, where issues are apparent, it is important these are not minimised and instead fully understood and used as an opportunity to improve.

I look forward to continuing to work alongside the Rail Ombudsman in 2026.

Jon Walters
Independent Assessor

The Rail
Ombudsman



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