

Investigating concerns: What to expect

Step 1

When we investigate concerns you have reported, we will look at your information carefully alongside all the other information we hold about the firm or individual.

At this stage we may decide:

- we need to contact the firm to ensure a breach does not happen again or to ask a firm to improve their systems and procedures;
- we need to pursue a detailed formal investigation which could lead to disciplinary sanctions or restrictions on the way a firm or individual operates;
- we don't need to take any further action in light of everything else we know. We will keep information on file in case it is needed in the future.

Step 2

If we decide we need to act

If we decide that we need to act to protect the public from harm, we will contact the firm or formally investigate, using your information, along with any information provided from other sources.

This stage can be time-consuming because we need to build a complete picture of the issues involved, and will need to work closely with the individual or firm.

Contact with you if we are investigating

We don't usually contact you during this period, unless we think you might have further information that could help us, or to ask you to act as a witness or provide a witness statement. Due to the complexity of some of the issues we deal with, this process can be lengthy, sometimes lasting many months, especially if it involves other agencies such as the police.

We will always write to provide information about the outcome, but this can take some time.

How long the investigation will take

Many cases are concluded within three months and most cases within 12 months. We will provide you with an update at three-monthly intervals if we have not been able to conclude the case sooner. We would like to update you more regularly but that would take us away from our investigatory work. We hope you understand.

What action we will take

The majority of complaints we receive do not result in formal disciplinary sanctions (such as fines or rebukes). That's because, wherever possible, we try to change behaviours and ensure our standards are complied with in the future. We may for example provide advice or agree compliance plans with a firm.