

Telephones and facsimile

1. Telephones – General

1.1 Switchboard

1.1.1 The IND (India Buildings) switchboard number is 0151-237 5200. It is operational from 9am - 4.30pm (Mon-Fri) and can be reached from internal extensions by dialling '0'. The switchboard auto attendant initially provides callers with a prompt to dial one of the following numbers:

1. To speak to a particular member of staff, where the caller knows the extension number
2. For an enquiry about an existing application
3. For an application form
4. For a certificate of entitlement to the Right of Abode
5. For a nationality-related enquiry
6. For the Switchboard operator

1.1.2 If the caller does not enter one of these numbers, the auto attendant will automatically default to the switchboard.

1.2 Staff moves

1.2.1 Computer and Statistics Section should be notified in advance if members of staff change extensions or leave the Directorate.

1.3 RESTRICTED - NOT AVAILABLE FOR DISCLOSURE

1.4 Requests for new equipment/removal of surplus equipment

1.4.1 Details should be sent to Computer and Statistics Section, which will arrange for equipment to be supplied or removed.

2. Private calls

2.1 Staff are NOT permitted to make private calls using official telephones, but should instead use either of the payphones situated in the Rest Room and Smoking Room.

3. Telephone calls (Dos and Don'ts)

Do

- Remember, when speaking on the telephone that you are speaking on behalf of the Home Office
- Make sure you have read the instructions on DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION
- Have pencil and paper to hand and take down the caller's full names, date and place of birth, file number, if any, and the main points of the conversation

- Be helpful if the call is not for you. If you are unable to transfer the call, or do not know who would be best placed to deal with the caller, take the caller's name and number and arrange for him or her to be telephoned later on
- Replace the receiver if you are disconnected. It is for the person who initiated the call to arrange for a reconnection
- Excuse yourself temporarily to caller number one if a second telephone rings while the first is being answered, and arrange to call back the second caller
- Be patient and polite, even if the enquirer is "difficult" or rude; this often happens over the telephone because of the lack of the restraining influence of a face-to-face interview (but see also paragraph 4 below)
- Be as helpful as you can, but don't forget that the information you give, and the manner in which you give it, may be quoted in subsequent representations
- Go and see a Senior Caseworker and ask if he/she will take over the call, if the caller is not satisfied with your reply and asks to speak to a senior officer
- If the caller asks for some action to be taken, try to complete it that day. If this is not possible e.g. because there are no typists available to type the necessary letter), the caller should be assured that it will be done first thing the next morning. No caller should be given the impression that it is unreasonable for him to ring up towards the end of the day, or that we down tools at a certain time however urgent the needs of the public
- Give your name if asked to do so; to refuse creates an undesirable impression of bureaucratic obstructiveness

Don't:

- Use technical terms or Home Office jargon such as "on conditions" or "Lay By"
- Give information about internal matters such as the movement of files, lunch periods, etc
- Leave a caller hanging on for long periods unless he knows what is happening - it may be better to call him back
- Disclose in what part of the office the case is under consideration when asked about the progress of an application. In particular don't mention the fact that the case has been referred to the Legal Adviser, to avoid a solicitor telephoning him to discuss the case
- Transfer a caller to another section unless you are sure it can deal with the call. If the caller asks for an officer by name, don't transfer the call until you have made sure that the officer concerned is willing to take the call

4. Abusive telephone calls

4.1 Sometimes, the behaviour on the telephone of an applicant or representative may fall short of the normal standards we would expect. Members of staff are not expected to tolerate abusive or threatening remarks from applicants or those calling on their behalf. Senior management will not allow applicants or representatives to cause distress to members of staff or attempt to further their application by using abusive or threatening language.

4.2 Abusive calls

4.2.1 If you receive an abusive call, or during the call the caller becomes abusive:

- Tell the caller, firmly but politely, that you will end the conversation and put the phone down if the abusive language does not stop. If it continues, despite this warning, hang up
- Minute the file, if there is one, or make a note of the call, providing details of the call, and send a copy of the minute or note, via your line manager, to the Directorate Complaints Officer. This is particularly important because:
 - a. the applicant or representative may want to make a complaint because you ended the call abruptly. If you can demonstrate that you hung up because the caller was abusive, and you followed these guidelines, the complaint can be dismissed quickly; and
 - b. the Directorate Complaints Officer can make enquiries to see whether other members of staff in IND have experienced similar behaviour from that caller. If so, they will decide, in consultation with the Director and IND Complaints Unit, whether the caller should be warned about his/her future behaviour. While any abusive remarks can be difficult to deal with, abuse from representatives (i.e. professionals representing clients) will not be condoned.

4.2.2 Action by the Director can include:

- Bringing the incident to the attention of the senior partner of the firm involved; and/or
- Making a complaint to the appropriate professional body; and/or
- Insisting that future communication with IND is made only in writing

4.3 Heated calls

4.3.1 If, during a telephone call, the conversation becomes heated, the following points will help you keep control, and might help to avoid the caller becoming abusive:

- Keep calm, and try to remain as objective as possible. Try not to take what caller is saying personally. Try to keep the tone of your voice calm and measured - if your speech shows any hint of frustration or aggression, it will be difficult to remain in control of the conversation
- Do not lose your temper, however much you are provoked. Keep calm, and do not raise your voice or be rude back. Let the caller "blow off steam" and

have his/her say. Let them know that you have taken on board the fact that they are upset - this does not mean that you agree or disagree with what they have said

- Make your comments positively and confidently. If you know the caller's name, use it to gain attention, and ask questions to find out what the problem is - your reaction will be conditioned by the validity of the grievance
- Do not allow the caller to take over the call and force you into saying something that you regret or that is wrong
- If the caller becomes abusive, take the steps described above

5. Facsimile machine

5.1 A facsimile machine for general use is located in the Management Support Unit (number 0151-237 5385).

5.2 Although members of staff are expected to operate the facsimile machine themselves, MSU staff will provide assistance where necessary.

5.3 The following additional facsimile machine is located in INPD(L):

For general enquiries (number 0151-237 5386)