

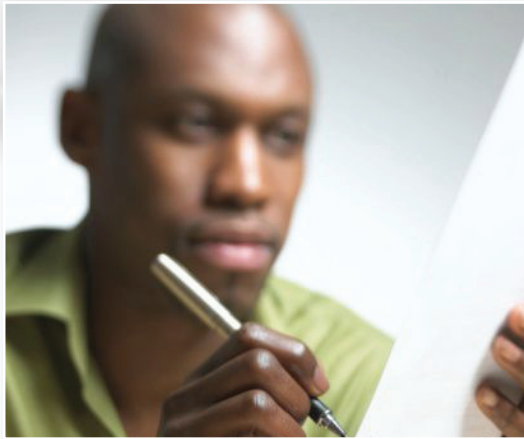
# GUIDELINES FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS



**Office of Public Sector Reform  
Ministry of Civil Service**



# *Guidelines for Handling Complaints*





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# 1

## *Introduction*

**1.1** These procedures aim to ensure that all staff in Ministries/ Departments/Agencies:

- accurately record complaints about our service received from any of our customers;
- treat complaints seriously and deal with them promptly;
- resolve complaints informally wherever possible;
- learn from complaints and take action to improve performance.



## 2

# Complaints

2.1 The definition of a complaint is very broad:

***Any written or spoken expression of dissatisfaction with the service provided by a member of staff.***

2.2 These procedures cover complaints made about dissatisfaction with the way staff members have dealt with an individual outside the Department or delivery of a particular service, for example, delays in replying to letters, not answering telephones, alleged rudeness of staff, etc. This includes complaints made by other Government departments and agencies, as well as members of the public.

2.3 They do not cover complaints made about Government's policy, nor do they cover a refusal to provide information, unless of course it is alleged that the member of staff was rude when dealing with the request for information; or any service level agreement with individuals or organisations outside the Department which have their own review procedures.

***2.4 It is vital that each head of a ministry/department/agency designate a Complaint Officer(s) to handle complaints. The designated officer(s) will receive and pass on complaints (Overleaf). The officer(s) should be trained in customer care and should have experience with handling calls.***



## 3

# *What to do if you Recieve a Complaint*

### *Proper timeframe to respond*

**3.1** If someone complains to you verbally either on the telephone or in person try to deal with it on the spot. ***Part 1 of the attached Complaints Form should be completed at this stage, even if you dealt with the complaint on the spot.***

If you receive a written complaint, try to deal with it immediately. If that is not possible, written complaints should be acknowledged within ***five (5) working days*** of receipt; the acknowledgment should state that a full response will be sent within the target of ***ten (10) working days*** of first receiving the letter. Every effort should be made to respond well within this target. ***Part 1 of the attached Complaints Form should be completed at this stage, even if you dealt with the complaint on the spot.***

### *Passing complaints on to the appropriate person*

**3.2** If you are not the person designated to handle complaints, whether received verbally or by letter, pass these complaints immediately to whoever in the department is responsible for the issue and can organize corrective action. Written complaints should be attached to the Complaints Form. ***Part 1 of the Complaints Form should be completed at this stage.*** If you are not sure to whom you should pass the complaint, do not keep it at your desk, consult your own Head of Department.



**3.3** In the case of a complaint made on the telephone and it cannot be solved on the spot, or you are not the appropriate individual to deal with the complaint, tell the person who has made the complaint that you are passing him/her on to someone else and give that person's name and direct telephone number.

**3.4** If you have been passed a complaint by another member of staff, take action yourself within **five (5) working days** of receiving it, either by telephoning or writing with a response, or writing to acknowledge that you have received the complaint.

#### **Responding to the complaint**

**3.5** Dealing with a complaint will often be a matter of getting the details of the problem, and if legitimate, apologise for any failure and arrange for something to be done – e.g. replying to an outstanding letter or sending on a document. If you need to, telephone the complainant (if possible) and follow-up by written response to arrange corrective action. ***Once you have dealt with the complaint, Part 2 of the attached Complaints Form should be completed.***

#### **Review of redress offered**

**3.6** If the complainant is not satisfied with the response, you can tell him/her in response that he/she has the right to ask for further investigation into the matter.

**3.7** If the complainant takes up that option, the complaint should be passed to the Head of Department for further review.

**3.8** The Head of Department's substantive response to the complaint should be sent within **ten (10) working days** of the request for review having first been received. The response should refer to the option for external review by the Ombudsman, if the complainant is of the view that maladministration has taken place. ***At this stage, Parts 3 and 4 of the attached Complaints Form should be completed.***



### **Keeping the complainant informed**

**3.9** If at any stage in the process a deadline will not be met, contact the complainant before the end of the period explaining why you are unable to provide a substantive response and give a further deadline – which should be no more than another **five (5) working days**.

### **Persistent complainants**

**3.10** Some complainants will continue to write or telephone regardless of the response they have received, and even after review of the redress offered. ***To prevent another member of staff from dealing with an issue that has already been dealt with, if the complaint is the same every time, that point should be recorded in Part 5 of the original Complaints Form.*** This practice is good so that if the complainant contacts different people about the same matter, the possibility of duplication should be minimized. A simple acknowledgment should be sent confirming the final response from the Head of Department. ***If it is a different complaint, a new Complaints Form should be used.***

### **Rude and abusive complainants**

**3.11** You may receive a letter or telephone call from a rude or abusive person. Always try to be polite but firm with abusive callers: never be rude to them; it will only make the situation worse. Be professional. If it becomes clear that the advice or response you offer has no effect, and the abuse continues, there will be a point at which you should terminate the call or correspondence. A note should be put on the Complaints Form that the correspondent/caller had been abusive.



## 4

# *Redress*

**4.1** The response to any complaint should offer redress as appropriate. This will normally be an apology; an explanation of what went wrong; notification of the corrective action taken; an offer to redo the service correctly and an assurance that it will not happen again. If it is appropriate, the complainant should be asked at the beginning what outcome he is looking for. You should ensure, as far as possible, that the complainant is satisfied with the redress offered.





**5.1** All complaints received should be sent to the designated person(s) in the Department (using the Complaints Form) who will keep records of complaints and monitor final resolution.

**5.2** The purpose of these procedures is not to apportion blame, but to ensure that corrective action is taken and staff in the Department learns from complaints. Each year, the person(s) designated to handle complaint(s) should produce a summary of the complaints received and any lessons to be learnt from them.

**5.3** Subject to the volume and variety of complaints, these summaries will then be considered by management. Before doing this, the Permanent Secretary may wish to select a random sample of complaints and assess whether these procedures were followed correctly and whether the response adequately addressed the issues raised and provided effective redress. The Complaints Procedure should also be reviewed at the same time to determine its effectiveness.

**5.4** The attached Complaints Form provides a permanent record of the various stages of written and oral complaints and should be kept by all staff.



# 5

## *Monitoring*

### **Complete:**

#### **Part 1**

when you first receive a complaint;

#### **Part 2**

when you respond to the complaint – send to the Team Leader;

#### **Part 3**

if the complainant is dissatisfied with your response and asks for further review by the Head of Department – retrieve the Form from the person designated to handle complaints and send it to the Head of Department with all previous papers; when the Head of Department's response is sent – return the form to the designated person;

#### **Part 4**

when the complaint has been dealt with either after the initial response or a subsequent exchange;

#### **Part 5**

if the complainant continues to make the same complaint, despite review by the Head of Department.

#### ***Important !!***

***5.5 Copies of all correspondence and records of all telephone calls should be kept in a complaints file.***



# 6

## Complaints Form

*For Ministries/Departments/Agencies use*

*Please tick (✓) the appropriate box*

**Part 1 (complete when complaint is first received)**

*Name of complainant:*

*Address:*

*Telephone (if known):*

*Date received:*

*By whom:*

*Written*

*Oral*

**Category:**

*Delay*

*Poor quality service*

*Rudeness*

*Unhelpfulness*

*Other*

*Brief details of complaint:*

*Abusive caller?*



# 7

## *Part 2 - Complaints Form*

### **Part 2 (complete when response is sent)**

*Date of response:*

*Sent by:*

*Action taken to resolve the complaint:*

### **Part 3 (complete when request for review by the line manager is received)**

*Date received:*

*Brief details of reason for dissatisfaction with response:*

*Line manager's comments:*

*Action taken as a result of the review of the initial response:*

### **Part 4 (complete at the end of the complaint process)**

*Lessons learnt/corrective measures taken/improvements/decision/procedures changed:*

### **Part 5 (complete if complainant continues to complain about the same issue)**


*Date of complaint:*

*Date acknowledged:*

*Brief details:*

*Date of complaint:*

*Date acknowledged:*



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