



Procedure

Customer complaints management

Audience

Department-wide

Implementation Date: 11/06/2018

Version: 1.1

Purpose

This procedure sets out a consistent approach for managing customer complaints across the department. This procedure is to be read in conjunction with the department's Customer Complaints Management Framework and policy.

Overview

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction. Complaints from staff and customers present opportunities to improve the department's business and ensure strategic priorities are achieved. Complaints management is an ongoing, proactive process that is part of a culture of continuous improvement.

Responsibilities

Complainant

- provide a clear idea of the problem and the desired solution
- provide all relevant information when the complaint is made
- understand that complex complaints can take time to review
- inform the department of changes affecting the complaint, including telling the department when help is no longer required
- cooperate in a respectful way and understand that unreasonable conduct will not be tolerated.

All staff involved in managing complaints

- ensure complaints are managed according to the department's Customer Complaints Management Framework, policy and procedure
- direct customer enquiries to the complaints page on the Department of Education (DoE) website
- resolve complaints promptly
- maintain appropriate records to support each step in the complaints management process
- ensure an up-to-date complaints register is maintained in TRIM or a secure local database



- ensure complaints management is considered as part of planning and risk management activities
- participate in complaint management training and awareness activities.

School principals

- resolve complaints promptly or if unable to be promptly resolved, seek a review as appropriate
- report to the regional director on complaints matters as required
- ensure information on how to make a complaint is available and visible in the reception area
- ensure the school website homepage has a link to the complaints page on the DoE website.

Regional offices

- resolve complaints promptly or if unable to be promptly resolved, seek a review as appropriate
- report to divisional management and/or Office of the Director-General on complaints matters
- ensure information on how to make a complaint is available and visible in the reception area
- review complaint information to inform improvements to service delivery.

Central office divisions

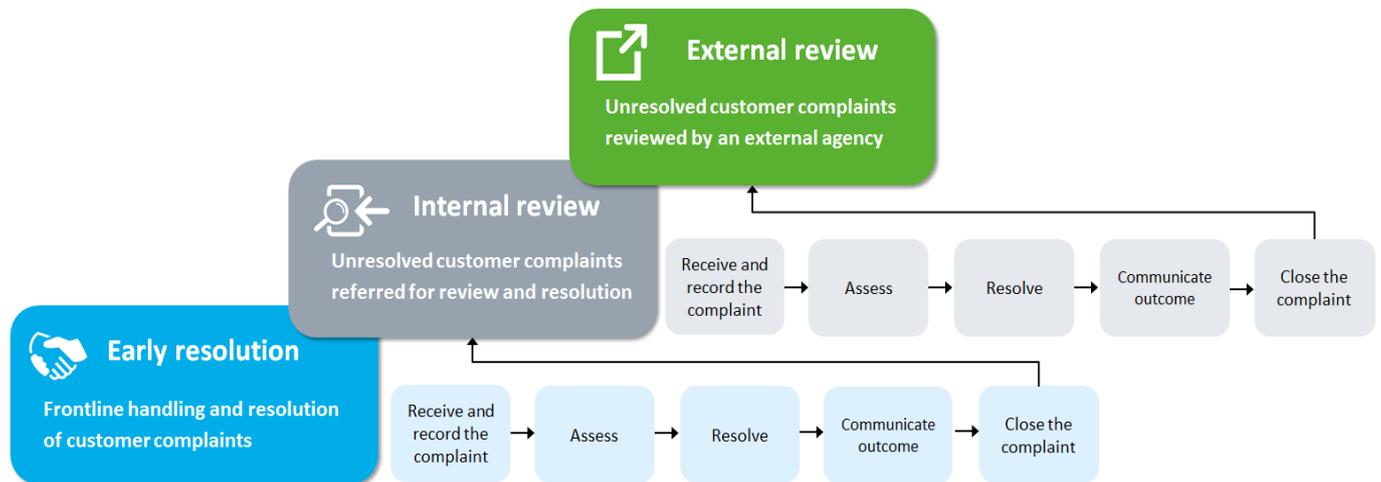
- resolve complaints promptly or if unable to be promptly resolved, seek a review as appropriate
- report to divisional management on complaints matters
- ensure information on how to make a complaint is available and visible in the reception area
- ensure complaint webpages are up-to-date and linked to the DoE complaints homepage
- review complaint information to inform improvements to service delivery.

DoE complaints manager

- oversee DoE complaints management performance monitoring and reporting
- publish annual departmental complaints data on the DoE website by 30 September as required in section 219A of the *Public Service Act 2008* (Qld)
- provide advice and guidance to business areas
- promote equitable access to the department's complaints processes, for all customers, and ensure they are child-friendly
- review the complaints management system annually with results reported to the Executive Management Board (EMB)
- identify and implement mechanisms to obtain feedback of the operation of the complaints management system including satisfaction survey, staff feedback and internal and external audits
- develop an annual staff awareness plan including training materials to ensure all staff are aware of the department's complaint management processes.

Process

The department's approach to handling complaints is based on the Australian Standard (AS/NZS ISO 10002:2014 – Guidelines for complaint management in organisations).



1.0 Early resolution

The department aims to resolve complaints quickly at the frontline or the point where the complaint is received.

Staff will maintain appropriate records to support each step in the complaints management process.

1.1 Receive complaint and record in register

- a) Determine whether the enquiry received is a complaint.
 - It is not a complaint when our customers:
 - request information
 - request a change in services or request a new service
 - make a suggestion for improving our services
 - express a concern about a situation
 - provide feedback on the department's performance
 - are not directly affected by the decision or action of the department
 - provide information e.g. reporting an incident.
- b) In receiving the complaint, if health and safety issues are raised by staff, or unrealistic demands are made on the department's time and resources, staff and managers should assess the level of risk and any other relevant factors to determine the action to take.
- c) Record the complaint.
 - Ensure all complaints, including anonymous complaints, received or re-directed from another department or business area within DoE are recorded in a complaints register. The complaints register must capture the information required to prepare the annual complaints report (please refer to the *Complaints data collection spreadsheet* (DoE employees only 16/530188)).

- d) Provide acknowledgement of the receipt of a complaint.

1.2 Assess and resolve

- a) Attempt to assess and resolve complaints, where possible, at the point of receipt. Solutions may include:
- providing explanation and reasons if not previously provided
 - dismissing the complaint, e.g. if the decision accords with legislation or government policy or related workplace policy or procedure
 - concluding that the complaint has been substantially resolved
 - reaching a compromise solution
 - upholding the complaint and implementing specific action such as overturning a decision, giving an apology or providing a service not previously provided
 - addressing or referring the issue for system improvement.

Systems improvement may involve one or more of the following:

- referral for consideration of legislative or policy change
- policy development or revision
- process improvement (i.e. changes to procedures and workplace practices)
- program review
- expert assistance, staff development or performance improvement
- improved implementation (e.g. issuing updated documentation or reminders)
- monitoring compliance
- other action to ensure that the matter is handled appropriately in future.

1.3 Communicate outcome

- a) Communicate progress and/or outcomes of the complaint process, including providing a clear explanation of the final decision, any recommendations, review options and any external review mechanisms, to the complainant.
- The time taken to resolve a complaint depends on the complexity and nature of the complaint. As a guide:
 - simple complaints may take up to 20 working days
 - complaints requiring some inquiry may take up to 45 working days
 - complaints requiring further investigation and escalation may take up to 90 working days or longer in some cases.

1.4 Close complaint

- a) Close the complaint in the complaints register with a note describing the outcome and complainant communication.
- b) In closing the complaint sufficient information must be captured as to whether the complaint required further action and to allow the categorisation of complaints into the agreed departmental complaints categorisation scheme.

- c) In closing the complaint, if further action is recommended local management is responsible for implementing and monitoring the recommendation/s. Local management should also advise the DoE complaints manager of the implementation action for the recommendations.
- d) If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome determined at the point of receipt, the complainant may request an internal review.

2.0 Internal review

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint they may request an internal review.

Staff will maintain appropriate records to support each step in the complaints management process.

2.1 Receive complaint

2.2 Assess and resolve

- a) Complainants who are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint can request an internal review. Internal review should:
 - be completed by appropriately trained independent staff who undertake a comprehensive review of the complaint
 - assess both the process to investigate and resolve the complaints and/or the merits of the original decision or action
 - document the outcome of the review and the options for external review.

2.3 Communicate outcome

- a) Communicate the outcome of the review process, including providing a clear explanation of the final decision, any recommendations and any external review mechanisms, to the complainant.

2.4 Close complaint

- a) Assess the effectiveness of the review processes and identify and document lessons that may inform improvements to the complaints management process, risk assessment and operational planning.
- b) Close the complaint in the complaints register with a note describing the outcome and complainant communication.
- c) The complaints manager should be advised of any lessons that may inform improvements to the department's operations.

3.0 External review

If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome after internal review, they may seek an external review.

3.1 Refer to an external review authority

- a) Where a customer remains dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint after an internal review decision, details of external review authorities should be provided to enable the customer to submit an external review directly with the Queensland Ombudsman, Public Service Commission, Information Commissioner or other relevant authority.

Definitions

Customer Complaints Management Framework	Outlines the department's framework for managing complaints in a consistent way by describing standards and principles to guide complaints management processes in the department.
Complaints management system	Encompasses all aspects of the policies, procedures, practices, staff, hardware and software used by an organisation for the management of complaints.
Complaints register	A tool for recording receipt of a complaint (including complainant details) and outcomes. Registers must be maintained in the department's document management system TRIM or, where TRIM cannot be accessed on a secure file or local database. The security status of complaints data is Confidential.
Complainant	Person, organisation or their representative (including clients, consumers, service users, customers, etc.) making a complaint.
Customer complaint	<p>(a) means a complaint about the service or action of a department, or its staff, by a person who is apparently directly affected by the service or action; and</p> <p>(b) includes, for example, a complaint about any of the following—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) a decision made, or a failure to make a decision, by a public service employee of the department; (ii) an act, or failure to act, of the department; (iii) the formulation of a proposal or intention by the department; (iv) the making of a recommendation by the department; (v) the customer service provided by a public service employee of the department. <p>(Source: Section 219A <i>Public Service Act 2008</i> (Qld)).</p>
External review	A formal process conducted by an external review body to ensure that the department's decision-making is fair and reasonable and that proper procedures are followed in making decisions including those from internal reviews.
Feedback	Opinions, comments and expressions of interest or concern, made directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly to or about the department, its products, services, staff or its handling of a complaint. Feedback is not a complaint.
Internal review	A formal process conducted by appropriately trained departmental staff which seeks to establish whether the complaint management process in response to the original complaint was appropriate and/or the outcome reached was reasonable.
Resolution	A complaint is resolved when the issue raised is dealt with in line with the CMS. The resolution of a complaint may not be to the satisfaction of a complainant. If a complainant refers his/her complaint to a recognised external review body after the department has resolved the complaint, then the complaint is considered resolved until notified by the external review body.

Request for information	An application for information related to an interest or a concern made directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly to or about the department, its products, services, staff or its handling of a complaint. A request for information is not a complaint.
Request for service	An application for a service related to an interest or a concern made directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly to or about the department, its products, services, staff or its handling of a complaint. A request for service is not a complaint.
Unreasonable complainant conduct	<p>Conduct is likely to be unreasonable where it involves actions or behaviours which because of its nature or frequency, raises substantial health, safety, resource or equity issues for the department, its staff, other service users or the complainant themselves. Examples of unreasonable complainant conduct, includes unreasonable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • persistence - for example, making excessive and unnecessary phone calls or emails • demands - for example, demanding more reviews than provided for in the policy or demanding a different outcome without demonstrating that the original decision was incorrect • lack of cooperation - for example, refusing to identify the issue of complaint or providing disorganised information • arguments - for example, making irrational claims • behaviour - for example, unreasonable aggression or violence to staff or threatening harm to self and others.

Legislation

- [Public Service Act 2008 \(Qld\)](#) Section 219A

Related policies

- [Customer Complaints Management Framework](#)
- [Customer complaints management](#)
- [Enterprise risk management](#)

Related procedures

- [Complaints management and compliance under the Education and Care Services Act 2013](#)
- [Managing employee complaints](#)
- [Education Queensland International – Complaints and appeals process](#)
- [Education Queensland International – Deferral, suspension and cancellations of enrolment](#)
- [Enterprise risk management](#)

Guidelines

- AS/NZS ISO 10002:2014 – Guideline for complaint management in organisations

Supporting information/websites

- [Making a customer complaint – Information for parents and carers](#)
- Complaints data collection spreadsheet (DoE employees only – 16/530188)

Contact

For further information, please contact:

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Review date

31/12/2017

Superseded versions

Previous seven years shown. Minor version updates not included.

1.0 Customer complaints management

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