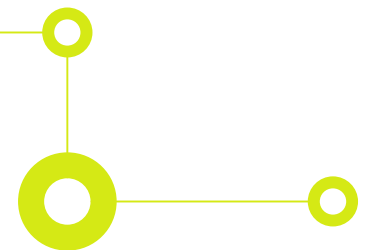




EFFECTIVE COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT
SELF AUDIT CHECKLIST





The Queensland Ombudsman’s Office has developed this Checklist as a resource for agencies to use to assess their own complaints management policies and practices.

The checklist covers all facets of good complaints management. It is based on the Ombudsman’s *Effective Complaints Management Fact Sheets*, which in turn incorporate relevant material from a wide range of authoritative sources, including in particular –

- the Ombudsman’s Office’s more than 30 years experience in managing complaints in the Queensland State and local government sectors;
- Directive 13/06 on *Complaints Management Systems (2006)* issued by the Office of Public Service Commissioner (OPSC) Queensland; and
- Australian and international Standard AS ISO 100002-2006 *Customer Satisfaction – Guidelines for complaints handling in organisations*.

Effective Complaints Management Self Audit Checklist

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Introduction

- Do you know how your agency's complaints management system compares to best practice?
- Does your agency's complaints management system have to comply with the PSC Directive 13/06?
- Can you be sure that complaints are handled consistently and fairly across your agency?
- Does your agency use customer feedback to improve the quality of its service?
- Would you like to identify what needs to be improved in your agency's complaints management system?

This Self Audit Checklist is designed to help you gauge your agency's performance against best practice standards (and the PSC Directive if applicable) by evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of your existing complaints management arrangements and identifying areas for improvement.

Participant instructions

The checklist is a self-assessment diagnostic tool. Each element corresponds to the similarly named and numbered Fact Sheet. If you need further information on any particular element refer to the relevant Fact Sheet.

Who should complete the checklist?

Depending on the size and structure of your agency, this checklist may be able to be completed by one person or may require a team effort. Ideally, a senior member of a customer service team should be involved. Some questions may need to be referred to other teams or management.

Forming a team that represents the breadth and depth of the customer service function within your agency may provide the best results. The answers are meant to reflect the position of the agency as a whole, not just the views of the individual completing the checklist.

Completing the checklist

The checklist comprises five columns that enable you to complete a thorough assessment of your agency's current complaints management system. It also helps you to devise action points to improve your system.

Elements

There are 14 elements. These reflect the essential requirements for effective complaints management as discussed in the *Effective Complaints Management Fact Sheets* series.

Indicators

The indicators are the policies, procedures and practices that would be expected in a good quality internal complaints management system to achieve or satisfy the elements.

As you work through the checklist, it may seem that some indicators are similar or repeated. In some cases, while the indicators seem similar, they apply in different contexts and therefore have slightly different meanings. Some elements, e.g. communication and training, apply across a number of areas. For example, good communication is required in all stages of complaints management.

Common indicators are repeated where appropriate so that you can get a sense of how your system fares on each separate element. While this may increase the number of indicators that you have to consider, having considered them once, you should be able to deal with them immediately when they next appear.

Assessment

Use the following three-point scale to assess each indicator:

1. No
 2. Partially
 3. Yes
- N/A Not applicable

Obviously, wherever you have a 1 that indicates an area where your system may require improvement, and similarly 2s to a lesser extent. A large number of 1s on any element indicate an area for more comprehensive consideration.

What supports your assessment?

Where you have indicated an assessment of 3 or 2, record the details of the policies, procedures or practices you have relied upon to make your assessment in this column. This assists verification and review.

Recommended actions for improvement

In this column detail the strategies or actions your agency needs to implement in order to fully satisfy the requirements of those indicators you have identified as only partially addressed or not addressed at all.

Action plan

In this column you should try to put your recommended actions for improvement for the indicator into an action plan. Your action plan should address the process, responsible officers, reporting requirements and timeframes. A separate sheet may be preferable in some cases.

Putting it all together

Once completed, the checklist should indicate the deficiencies you have identified in your complaints management system and provide a series of action plans that address those deficiencies.

If you have identified the need for your agency to develop a complaints management policy and/or procedures, the Ombudsman's brochure *A Guide to Developing Effective Complaints Management Policies and Procedures* provides a framework.

The complaints management policies and/or procedures of a number of Queensland public sector agencies are also available on our website. These policies and procedures were developed in consultation with our Office as part of our Complaints Management Project and meet the requirements of good complaints handling. However, they were developed prior to the Public Service Commissioner's Directive on Complaints Management Systems (November 2006) and so any prepared by state government agencies may need to be revised in light of the Directive.

They were also prepared prior to the introduction of a new international and Australian Standard on complaints handling in April 2006 (AS ISO 10002-2006). That Standard did not suggest widespread change, but this checklist and other Ombudsman complaints management publications have been updated to reflect relevant changes in the Standard.

Element 1 — Setting the Scene

Indicators	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended actions for improvement	Action plan
1.1 Does your agency currently handle complaints in a clear methodical manner				
1.2 Is the manner in which complaints to your agency are handled widely known within your agency				
1.3 Do your staff know where to refer complaints internally				
1.4 Is your agency aware of the requirements of the PSC Directive 13/06				
1.5 Is accountability given much prominence in agency documentation (e.g. Strategic plan, annual report)				
1.6 Is your agency aware of the benefits of proper complaints handling as outlined in the Ombudsman's Fact Sheets				

Element 2 — Commitment

Indicators	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended actions for improvement	Action plan
2.1. Does your agency have complaints management policies and procedures				
2.2. Does complaints management in your agency have the visible support of senior management				
2.3. Do staff know complaints management is supported by senior management				
2.4. Have senior management and other relevant personnel been consulted about their needs				
2.5. Does your agency have a complaints friendly culture whereby complainants and complaints are viewed positively				
2.6. Are complaints management staff appropriately trained and resourced				
2.7. Do they have sufficient authority				

Element 2 — Commitment

Indicators	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended actions for improvement	Action plan
2.8 Are appropriate remedies available				
2.9 Is a senior officer responsible for the effectiveness of the system				
2.10 Are complaints upheld to any extent				

Element 3 — Communication

Indicator	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended action for improvement	Action plan
Does your agency –				
3.1	Have information brochures that are straightforward and in plain English			
3.2	Have clear arrangements for non-English speaking people, those with impairments and those who have been educationally disadvantaged			
3.3	Advise the public of indicative times for responses and actions			
3.4	Involve the community in its policy making and actions on matters that will affect them (e.g. by surveys or mail-outs)			
3.5	Genuinely address complainants' concerns when advising them of a decision			
3.6	Convey to the public a complaints-friendly culture that features a 'your problem is our problem' attitude			

Element 3 — Communication

Indicator	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended action for improvement	Action plan
3.7 Ask staff and customers to contribute to the improvement of your products and services				
3.8 Publicise complaints contact details in the telephone directory and prominently on your website.				
3.9 Provide training in areas such as interviewing skills, problem-solving, conflict resolution and writing in plain English				
3.10 Encourage staff to speak to concerned customers rather than responding in writing				
3.11 Clearly define agency communication practices in your customer service standards				
3.12 Provide cross-cultural training for staff and access to translation and interpreter services				
3.13 Use technology to help people communicate with your agency e.g. a hotline, freecall number, answering machine/s.				

Element 4 — Complaints Management Models

Indicators	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended actions for improvement	Action plan
Do your agency's current processes for handling complaints feature the following:				
4.1	A logical and methodical structure from start to finish			
4.2	A structured approach to dealing with complaints (e.g. interview sheets, check lists)			
4.3	A flexible structure that can accommodate different units within your agency			
4.4	Clear lines of authority			
4.5	A reviewer independent of the original decision-maker			
4.6	Power vested in the reviewer to overrule the decision complained of			
4.7	No more than 2 internal stages for the complainant to go through before receiving a final decision			
4.8	Clear guidance on how matters move from one stage to another			

Element 4 — Complaints Management Models

Indicators	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended actions for improvement	Action plan
4.9 Easy access to relevant agency material and personnel				
4.10 Control mechanisms to ensure consistent outcomes				
4.11 A mechanism for implementing a decision in favour of a complainant				
4.12 Direct lines of communication to the appropriate section for discussing concerns about systemic issues arising from the review of a complaint or complaints				

Element 5 — Visibility and Access

Indicator	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended action for improvement	Action plan
5.1 Can the public, customers, clients and staff readily find out where to lodge a complaint against your agency with you				
5.2 Can they readily find out how to make their complaint				
5.3 Are people able to find out what information is required when they complain				
5.4 Is it easy for them to lodge their complaint				
5.5 Is assistance available to people who wish to complain				
5.6 Can complaints be made orally				
5.7 Does your agency have a complaints management policy and procedures clearly visible on its website				
5.8 Is a hard copy readily available upon request				
5.9 Can complainants readily find out how their complaint will be handled				

Element 5 — Visibility and access

Indicator	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended action for improvement	Action plan
5.10 Are complainants told of possible time frames for dealing with their complaints				
5.11 Are complainants able to obtain advice as to the progress of their complaint				
5.12 Is all this information readily available on your website				
5.13 Are impaired or disadvantaged persons catered for in each of the above				

Element 6 — Responsiveness

Indicator	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended action for improvement	Action plan
6.1 Are your agency's complaints management policy and procedures widely known about within your agency				
6.2 Are they widely understood				
6.3 Are they on your intranet				
6.4 Have relevant staff been trained in how your system works				
6.5 Have relevant staff been trained in how your system works				
6.6 Do you have indicative time frames for dealing with matters				
6.7 Are they monitored				
6.8 Are they met				
6.9 Are complainants given indicative timeframes at the outset				
6.10 Do you prioritise according to criteria such as seriousness, urgency				

Element 6 — Responsiveness

Indicator	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended action for improvement	Action plan
6.11 Do you have service standards for whether, and if so how quickly, you respond to calls and correspondence from complainants regarding matters in progress				
6.12 Do your systems enable you to track timeframes and bring matters up				
6.13 Do you deal with anonymous complaints				

Element 7 — Assessment and Action

Indicator	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended action for improvement	Action plan
7.1 Do you have a methodical process for assessing complaints (as opposed to receiving and recording them)				
7.2 Is it clear who should assess complaints				
7.3 Do you have criteria to guide that assessment e.g. as in Ombudsman Fact Sheet 7 (seriousness, resources required, likelihood of an outcome)				
7.4 Do you assess for things other than fairness (as per the <i>Ombudsman Act</i> and the <i>Judicial Review Act</i>)				
7.5 Are complaints handling staff familiar with the jurisdiction of external agencies that can potentially handle complaints made to your agency (e.g. Ombudsman, CMC, Auditor-General)				
7.6 Are complaints handling staff familiar with the <i>Whistleblowers Protection Act</i> (WPA)				

Element 7 — Assessment and Action

Indicator	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended action for improvement	Action plan
7.7 Are procedures in place to recognise and deal with disclosures made under the WPA				
7.8 Does your agency's policy/procedure encourage you to resolve matters quickly and amicably if possible as an alternative to investigation				
7.9 Are complaints handling staff familiar with the meaning of natural justice				
7.10 Have staff been trained in complaints investigation				
7.11 Do complaints staff have adequate authority to make decisions				
7.12 Does your agency preserve complainants' privacy and confidentiality (identity, information gathered) wherever possible				

Element 8 — Feedback

Indicator	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended action for improvement	Action plan
8.1 Do you have service standards regarding providing timely advice to complainants after decisions have been made				
8.2 Do you give meaningful reasons for negative decisions that specifically address the complainant's contentions				
8.3 Are 'unsuccessful' complainants automatically advised of any internal review available to them e.g. second level of review, review panels				
8.4 Are 'unsuccessful' complainants automatically advised of any statutory appeals available to them (e.g. courts, tribunals)				
8.5 Are 'unsuccessful' complainants advised, upon inquiry by them or via your website, of any other external review mechanisms available to them (e.g. Ombudsman)				

Element 8 — Feedback

Indicator	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended action for improvement	Action plan
8.6 Does your system have a clear and workable mechanism for complaints staff to advise areas of the agency when potential system improvements are identified				
8.7 Does your system have a clear and workable mechanism for following up this advice				

Element 9 — Monitoring Effectiveness

Indicator	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended action for improvement	Action plan
9.1 Does your agency have any statutory, policy or procedural reporting requirements regarding complaints				
9.2 If so, is your current system able to reliably meet these requirements				
9.3 Are you able to identify complaint trends from your complaints data				
9.4 Is it clear who is responsible for identifying complaints trends				
9.5 Does your agency monitor the time it takes to resolve complaints				
9.6 Does your agency have some form of review or control, e.g. file audits, to ensure that data entry is accurate				
9.7 Does your agency have a structured process and timetable for evaluating your procedures				
9.8 If so, does that evaluation include all or most of the matters mentioned in Ombudsman Fact Sheet 9				

Element 9 — Monitoring Effectiveness

Indicator	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended action for improvement	Action plan
9.9 Do you evaluate outcomes from time to time				
9.10 If so, is the matter resolved to the complainant's satisfaction in a majority of cases				
9.11 Are the results of your complaints management system reported to staff				
9.12 Does your agency publish effectiveness criteria, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ numbers and types of complaints received; ▪ time taken to resolve, as measured against targets; ▪ outcomes in broad categories (e.g. resolved/not resolved); ▪ remedies provided (again in categories); ▪ satisfaction levels based on surveys; and ▪ action taken/business improvement as a result of complaints 				

Element 10 — Resources

Indicator	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended action for improvement	Action plan
Do your agency have or provide –				
10.1	A detailed complaints handling procedures manual and reference material readily available to complaints staff			
10.2	Modern information and communication complaints management technology and equipment that can both track individual cases and classify and report on aggregate data			
10.3	A toll-free complaints hotline that connects directly to the complaints section or designated officer			
10.4	An answering machine for messages to be left when the complaints section is unstaffed or busy			
10.5	Hands-free telephone equipment for complaints staff so that they may take notes as they talk			
10.6	A user-friendly complaints handling environment with low levels of noise and adequate interview facilities			

Element 10 — Resources

Indicator	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended action for improvement	Action plan
10.7 Information about complaints stages and processes and how to contact your complaints area included in resources such as leaflets and website				
10.8 An on-line complaints form and guidelines for customers on how to complain easily located on your website (not buried under a name such as 'Policies' with numerous other documents)				
10.9 Assistance for customers unable to write or communicate due to language or literacy difficulties or disability				

Element 11 — Personnel and Training

Indicator	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended action for improvement	Action plan
11.1 Are complaints staff happy to do the job				
11.2 Are complaints staff personally suited to the job (see Fact Sheet 11)				
11.3 Are complaints staff organisationally positioned to do the job (see Fact Sheet 11)				
11.4 Have staff received training in good decision-making				
11.5 Have staff received training in complaints handling				
11.6 Have staff received training in such things as dispute resolution, negotiation, handling difficult people, interviewing skills, customer service				
11.7 Are complaints staff able to de-brief				
11.8 Does your agency offer complaints staff any other mechanism or assistance for dealing with stress				

Element 12 — Remedies

Indicator	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended action for improvement	Action plan
Does your system –				
12.1 Offer an appropriate range of possible remedies (see Fact Sheet 12)				
12.2 Indicate when each remedy is available				
12.3 Indicate who may decide a particular remedy				
12.4 Allow the possibility of ex gratia payments in appropriate cases				
12.5 Encourage informal resolution and compromise as a first option				
12.6 Identify other parties who might be entitled to a remedy granted as a result of a complaint by another similarly placed person				

Element 13 — Business Improvement

Indicator	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended action for improvement	Action plan
13.1 Does your agency's complaints management policy emphasise that business/systemic improvement and improved service to the public and customers are major objectives of complaints management				
13.2 Does your system allow complaint trends to be identified periodically				
13.3 If so are those trends analysed for underlying systemic causes				
13.4 Is it clear who has responsibility for making that analysis				
13.5 Are these analyses reported to senior management				
13.6 Are these analyses fed back to the relevant business area or unit for remedial action				
13.7 Is there follow up by a designated person to see if remedial action has been taken				

Element 14 — External Review

Indicator	Assessment 3,2,1,N/A	What supports your assessment?	Recommended action for improvement	Action plan
14.1 Does your system indicate the various external review options available to dissatisfied complainants				
14.2 Does your policy emphasize the desirability of resolving matters with complainants if at all possible rather than engaging in time consuming external review				
14.3 Do you automatically advise people of external statutory appeal rights (e.g. to courts, tribunals)				
14.4 Do you advise people upon inquiry or via your website of other external review options (e.g. Ombudsman)				