

Complaints management

What is complaints management?

Complaints management is about resolving individual complaints and identifying opportunities to make systemic improvements.

Every organisation that deals with the public will receive complaints. The community expects government organisations to be customer-focused and responsive to complaints.

Government organisations are required to have complaints management systems (CMS) in place and be accountable for their decisions and actions.

Why manage complaints?

An effective CMS is integral to providing quality customer service. It helps to measure customer satisfaction and is a useful source of information and feedback for improving services. Often customers are the first to identify when things are not working properly.

Implementing an effective CMS:

- improves internal complaints handling
- reduces recurring complaints
- improves standards of service to the community
- raises standards of decision-making.

The way an organisation handles complaints can affect its reputation. Poorly handled complaints can be an expensive exercise that reflects badly on the organisation and reinforces poor business processes.

How should customer complaints be managed?

Customers making complaints should be treated with courtesy and respect. They should be given reasonable assistance to make their complaint.

Customer complaints should be managed by trained staff in an open, accountable, responsive, fair, efficient and effective way in accordance with the organisation's CMS.

What is a CMS?

A CMS is a step-by-step way of receiving, recording, processing, responding to and reporting on complaints and using them to improve systems, decision-making and service delivery.

The core components of a CMS are the organisation's complaints management policy and procedures, complaints database or recording system and other resources.

A CMS must comply with any applicable legislative requirements including recognised standards.

CMS statutory requirements

The *Local Government Act 2009* requires each council to adopt a process for resolving administrative action complaints.

Under the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000*, public universities must have appropriate internal complaints handling and appeals processes, including having a process in place for lodging a formal complaint or appeal if the matter cannot be resolved informally.

All Queensland public universities have adopted student grievances and appeals processes that apply to all students, not just overseas students.

The *Public Service Act 2008* requires each state government department and public service office to establish and implement a system for managing customer complaints that complies with the current Australian standard about handling customer complaints (**AS/NZS 10002:2014**).

AS/NZS 10002:2014 Guidelines for complaint management in organizations

The [standard](#) provides detailed guidance on managing customer complaints within organisations.

It covers guiding principles, complaints management framework, planning and design, operation, and maintenance and improvement.

CMS model

An effective CMS should provide three levels of review:

1. frontline complaints handling – early resolution
2. internal assessment, investigation or review
3. external assessment, investigation or review.

Early resolution

Early resolution covers complaints received by the first point of contact within an agency, such as service counters and call centres.

The majority of complaints should be resolved by these frontline staff, who should be given the appropriate procedures and training.

Internal assessment

Internal assessment should be used when a complaint is more serious or complex, or when a complaint can't be resolved by frontline staff.

The purpose of an internal assessment is to assess information provided by the complainant to identify and resolve the key issues.

An internal assessment should be conducted by a more senior officer who has had no prior involvement in the case.

Internal investigation

An internal investigation is designed to find and evaluate the facts to decide whether the complaint has merit.

An internal investigation should be considered where a complaint raises significant or complex issues for either the complainant or the organisation.

An investigation should be conducted by an officer with the necessary knowledge and experience to conduct an efficient and effective investigation.

Internal review

An internal review is a systematic way of reviewing the complaints process and outcome.

Its aim is to ensure the complaints process complied with the organisation's policy or procedural requirements and that the right outcome has been reached.

An internal review is not an investigation or re-investigation of a complaint. It is a merits review of the complaints process and outcome.

A senior officer, manager or other appropriate officer (internal review officer) should conduct an internal review. An internal review officer should:

- be in a position equal to or higher than officers involved in the decision/action subject of the complaint
- have no direct or perceived conflict of interest in the matter
- have broad discretion to overturn previous decisions and apply remedies.

External review

We are an external review agency.

In general, we will not investigate a matter until the complainant has tried to resolve the problem directly with the organisation concerned and has exhausted any other right of review.

When conducting an investigation, we:

- must maintain confidentiality
- are not bound by the rules of evidence
- must comply with natural justice.

We may provide a report and recommendations to the head of an organisation. These reports are sometimes tabled in the Queensland Parliament and released publicly.

Getting started

We have designed a guide to help organisations develop an effective [complaints management policy and procedures](#).

We would like to improve the way your organisation handles complaints. Book in for our [complaints management training](#), have your [complaints management system reviewed](#) or seek our [free advice](#) about managing complaints and good decision-making.

Training courses

We deliver the following training:

- [Good decisions training](#) is a program designed to help officers make better decisions. The training is suitable for all public sector decision-makers, including supervisors and managers.
- [Complaints management training](#) helps officers who deal with complaints, including officers who internally review complaints.
- [Public sector ethics training](#) focuses on the guiding principles of the Code of Conduct for the Queensland Public Service introduced in 2011. The program is supported by a suite of scenario-based activities.
- [Managing unreasonable conduct training](#) is a half-day course designed to help officers manage unreasonable conduct they may encounter when delivering services to the public.

Complaints management reference material

- [Website complaints visibility and accessibility](#)