

Corporate Complaint Resolution Standards

Contents

This guidance sets out the cross government complaint standards, which DWP uses to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

The contents of this guidance should be used to inform operational businesses complaint resolution processes and procedures. It provides a framework against which improvement activity can be targeted, mapped and assessed, with a view to promoting continuous improvement in complaints resolution across DWP.

Operational members of the Complaints Steering Group (CSG) will take the lead for progressing/ensuring compliance with the complaint standards, within their respective business areas.

Standard 1: Our complaint process is accessible to all and easy to use

Requirement	Responsibility
1.1 - We publish information which describes our definition of a complaint, and explains (if appropriate) the difference between a complaint about our service and dissatisfaction with a decision which carries statutory review and appeal rights	Operational businesses
1.2 – We publish information about: how to complain; what information to provide to inform our investigation of the complaint; what will happen in response to the complaint; and how long it should take to respond to the complaint	Operational businesses
1.3 - We accept complaints in a wide variety of ways, which recognises the needs of our customers. We will consider including digital access, for example web forms.	Operational businesses
1.4 - We provide customers with information about our approach to providing a remedy / redress in response to a justified complaint, incorporating: an apology, an explanation, an assurance; information; corrective action and financial redress	Corporate policy on Financial Redress (CReST) Financial Redress Policy & Guidance
	Operational businesses

Standard 2 - We provide staff with clear definitions , training and guidance about our complaints process

Requirement	Responsibility
2.1 We understand the core skills of complaint handlers and investigators and recognise their specific needs, which include recognising good complaint handling.	Operational businesses ensure appropriate training and support is given to complaint handlers.
2.2 – We have complaint policies and procedures, which are available to staff with responsibility for resolving complaints	Corporate (CReST) guidance available on how to deal with a range of specific situations Corporate complaints and redress guidance
	Operational businesses own complaint resolution processes and procedures
2.3 – We have an organisational wide definition of a complaint, which is clearly articulated within our policies and procedures and forms the basis of our complaint handling training.	Corporate complaint definition for recording and reporting purposes: <i>"any expression of dissatisfaction about the service provided which is not resolved by operational staff as normal business".</i>
	Operational businesses ensure definition is communicated to staff / embedded within operational guidance and training.
2.4 – We train staff on how to investigate and resolve complaints in a full and impartial manner	Operational businesses
2.5 – We develop a culture which values complaints and explain to staff the potential costs (to the complainant, our organisation and our reputation) of failing to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity	Operational businesses training material
2.6 - We provide staff with guidance on the circumstances in which we can consider providing financial redress	Corporate guidance (CReST) Corporate complaints and redress guidance
	Operational guidance on administering special payments
2.7 – We have put in place arrangements for administering cross cutting complaints, which is explained in guidance to staff	Corporate guidance (CReST) Corporate complaints and redress guidance
2.8 – We provide staff with guidance on how to deal with persistent complainants	Corporate guidance (CReST) Corporate complaints and redress guidance
2.9 – We provide guidance on how to administer complaints about staff	Corporate guidance (CReST) Corporate complaints and redress guidance
2.10 – We use standardised terminology for describing staff with responsibility for resolving complaints	Operational businesses
2.11 Staff who regularly handle complaints have an appropriate objective which reflects the need for both quality of handling and timeliness.	Operational businesses

Standard 3 - We focus on resolving complaints within specified timescales, and to high quality standard

Requirement	Responsibility
3.1 - We contact the complainant to clarify their (elements of) complaint; and obtain a clear articulation of what action they would like to see taken to resolve it	Operational business
3.2 – We keep the complainant informed of timescales for any agreed resolution actions	Operational business
3.3 - We retain a record of any discussion with the complainant or their representative	Operational business
3.4 - We tell complainants, at case closure, how long it will take to complete any outstanding action on their case	Operational business
3.5 – If the complainant tells us they are dissatisfied with our attempts to resolve their complaint, we escalate their complaint to the next stage of our complaints process	Operational business
3.6 – Our final response to the complaint is reviewed by someone who has had no involvement in earlier responses	Operational business
3.7 – If appropriate, our final response explains why we cannot achieve the desired outcome, and how to escalate the complaint if the complainant is unhappy with the explanation provided	Operational business

Standard 4 - We have mechanisms in place for assuring the quality of our complaint resolution processes

Requirement	Responsibility
4.1 – We have mechanisms in place to ensure complaint escalation and outcome data is regularly reviewed / analysed to inform performance and improvement activity	Corporate (Crest) collate quarterly DWP complaint data for briefings / reporting purposes.
	Operational businesses
4.2 - We have a defined process for quality assuring complaint responses	Operational businesses
	Corporate reviews periodically commissioned via the DWP Complaints Steering Group (CSG)
4.3 - We regularly review the effectiveness of our complaint resolution policies, guidance and operational procedures	Operational businesses
	Corporate - CReST
4.4 – We seek feedback from our customers on the quality of our complaint resolution process	Operational businesses
	Corporate reviews commissioned via the CSG

Standard 5 - We have clearly defined our complaint information requirements, and publish information

Requirement	Responsibility
5.1 - We record complaints in accordance with an agreed, organisational wide information specification	Corporate specification – agree via CSG. See Annex A Operational businesses - must develop their own complaint management information, which has at its core the information set out in the corporate specification
5.2 We recognise the importance of data analysis and the value this adds to gathering clear complaint information	Corporate – CReST annually review the complaint data for trends. Operational businesses
5.3 - We have agreed complaint categories, which help us identify and understand those aspects of our service which prompt users to complain	Corporate specification in respect of high level recording categories – and a number of mandatory (equality) sub categories - agreed via CSG. See Annex B Operational businesses determine their own complaint sub categories – which allow for the collection of complaint information which can be used to inform complaint improvement activity.
5.4 - We can provide data on the percentage of complaints responded to within our published clearance times	Operational businesses – collect data for reporting purposes (data is part of core complaint management information)
5.5 - We record the outcome of complaints, in terms of action taken to resolve/clear the complaint. For example: explanation / assurance / information / apology / corrective action / financial redress	Operational businesses – collect data for reporting purposes (data is part of core complaint) management information
5.6 - We have defined a standard set of complaint data for publication, which incorporates the number of recorded complaints	Corporate (CReST) has responsibility for agreeing, in discussion with CSG, what complaint information should be reported externally (Departmental report / quarterly data)
5.7 - We record and report how much we spend on special payments in response to maladministration (<i>in accordance with Treasury guidance on Managing Public Money – insert link</i>)	Corporate (CReST) has responsibility for providing information about DWP special payment expenditure for maladministration – routinely included in the Departmental Report and Accounts

Standard 6 - We have a clear mechanism for learning from our complaints to improve our service

Requirement	Responsibility
6.1 - We have in place a clear mechanism for sharing, analysing and considering how to respond to complaints performance data	Operational businesses
6.2 - We tell staff with responsibility for dealing with complaints how to escalate issues they identify which may have wider organisational implications. For example, if a process is	Operational businesses

having a negative impact on the customer experience	
6.3 - We have in place a clear mechanism for progressing systemic failures identified as a result of complaints about our service	Operational businesses
6.4 – We have in place a clear process for impacting and progressing systemic recommendations arising from complaints	Operational businesses
6.5 - We can demonstrate what improvements have been made as a result of complaints about our service	Operational businesses
6.6 We have effective change management processes which support our drive for continuous improvement	Corporate (CReST) Operational businesses
6.7 - We publish information about service improvements arising from complaints for the benefit of staff and customers	Operational businesses
6.8 – We have considered and articulated, for internal reference, what constitutes “success” in terms of complaint resolution improvement activity. For example, a reduction in the number of complaints escalating to our final tier and/or a reduction in the number of complaints upheld by independent complaint investigation bodies	Corporate (CReST) for agreement via CSG. See Annex C

Annex A:

Mandatory requirement for recording complaint information:

DWP businesses should have in place effective mechanisms for recording customer complaints activity in accordance with the *minimum information specification detailed below*.

As a minimum, businesses are required to record / maintain accurate case specific information on:

a)	Date complaint received
b)	Details of who made the complaint: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• customer• customer's own representative (e.g. a friend, relative or solicitor)• Member of Parliament• consumer representative organisation/body (e.g. CAB, Help the Aged)
c)	Benefit / claim to which complaint relates
d)	Tier / level at which complaint is being dealt with
e)	If appropriate, who instigated complaint escalation (tier 2) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• staff member / business• customer• customer's representative• MP
f)	Category of complaint at case closure (see Annex B for standard complaint categories)
g)	Complaint outcome in terms of any action taken to address/resolve the complaint, in accordance with the following categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• explanation• assurance• information• apology• corrective action• financial redress
h)	Date of complaint closure
i)	If appropriate, whether the final response was provided within published timescale

Businesses must develop their own standard complaints management information package, which has at its core the minimum information specification (above). It's the expectation that complaint information will be used to:

- monitor activity and performance in respect of complaint resolution;
- provide information to drive improvements in complaint handling, with a view to minimising the volume of escalated complaints;
- improve the delivery of front line services, thereby minimising the scope for customer dissatisfaction with the service provided.

Annex B

Corporate high level complaint categories

1)	DWP staff don't treat me with respect (<i>Right treatment</i>)
2)	You take too long (<i>On time</i>)
3)	You've got it wrong (<i>Right results</i>)
4)	You haven't given me the information that suits my needs (<i>Easy access</i>)
5)	I can't access the system/service (<i>Easy access</i>)
6)	DWP Policy is unfair

Mandatory complaint sub-categories

Equality

In response to the introduction of the Equality Act Public Sector Duty, which came into force on 1st April 2011, DWP businesses agreed that the collection of complaint sub-category information in respect of discrimination would be mandatory with effect from April 2011. The mandatory equality complaint sub-categories are detailed below:

- Discrimination – Gender Assignment
- Discrimination – Religion and belief
- Discrimination – Pregnancy and maternity
- Discrimination – Age
- Discrimination – Disability
- Discrimination – Race
- Discrimination - Sex
- Discrimination – Sexual Orientation
- Discrimination – Marriage and Civil Partnership

Security

DWP handles personal data on a daily basis, and on occasion, despite security measures undertaken to protect data, a breach of security may occur. It is important we effectively capture data regarding the security incidents, investigate the breach, and where appropriate make changes to prevent future re-occurrence. To ensure consistency in the data captured, the DWP businesses agreed that the introduction of complaint sub-category information in respect of security would be mandatory with effect from April 2015. The mandatory security complaint sub-categories are detailed below:

“You’ve got it wrong”

- You lost my paperwork;
- Personal information has been disclosed to a third party inappropriately.

“You haven’t given me the information that suits my needs”

- You haven't given me all the information requested in the subject access request;
- You haven't given me the information requested under FOI.

Optional complaint sub-categories

It will be for individual business to determine what additional complaint sub-category they collect. Further information about the sub-categories used by Operational staff can be found here: Operational sub-categories.

Annex C

What constitutes DWP “success” in terms of complaint resolution improvement activity?

Whilst the Department seeks to minimise causes for complaint by addressing customer issues / concerns at the first point of contact (business as usual / once and done), it does not have a specific objective¹ to reduce the number of recorded complaints. Rather, we aim to identify record and resolve all complaints quickly and thoroughly. Our success in doing so can be measured by:

- customer satisfaction with the administration of the complaint resolution process
- the percentage of complaints escalating from tier one to tier two of the complaint process. Low escalation rates suggests that complainants are satisfied that their complaint has been addressed / resolved to their satisfaction
- the percentage of complaints escalating to the Independent Case Examiner’s Office (ICE), which offer no scope for resolution without recourse to a full investigation. Low resolution rates suggest business complaint resolution processes are sufficiently robust, and that the complaint offers no obvious scope for resolution without an full investigation of the facts
- low levels of complaints upheld by ICE on investigation – suggest that all appropriate redress was provided or offered to the complainant, by the business, prior to escalation to ICE
- the Parliamentary Ombudsman upholds a smaller than average percentage of complaints about DWP, compared with other government departments.

¹ Any objective to reduce complaints could result in poor or under recording.