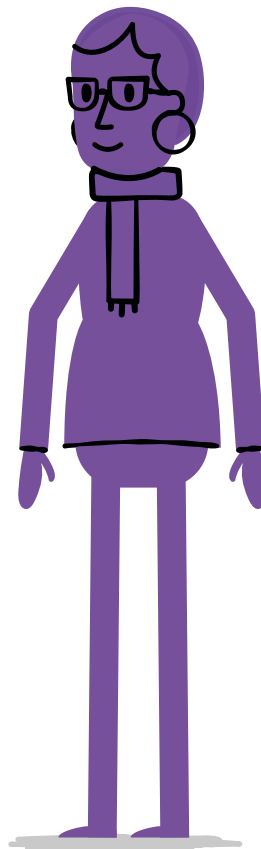
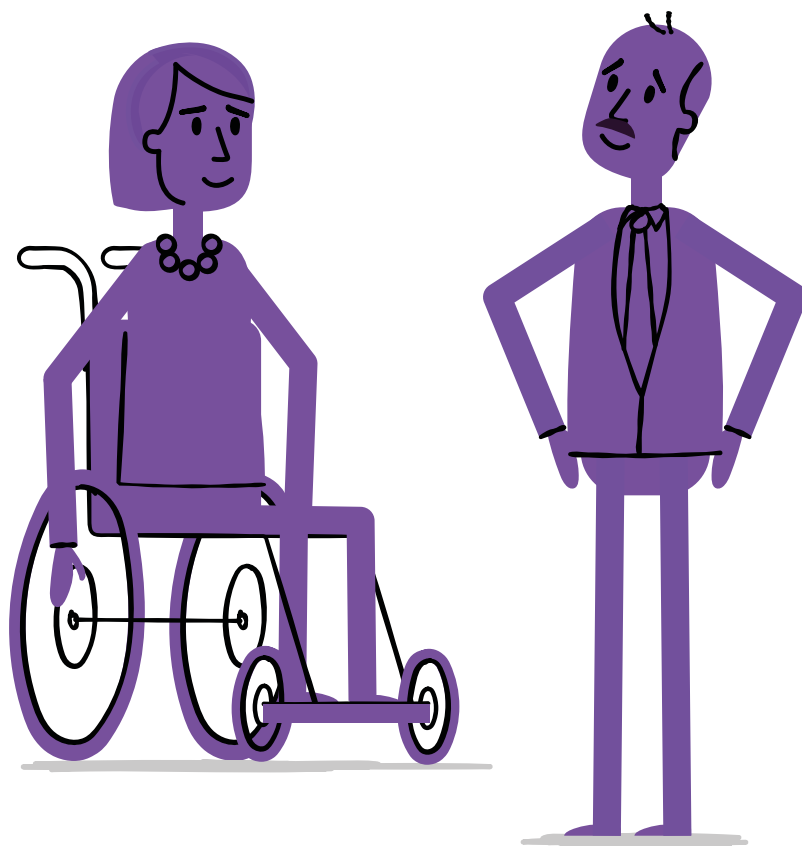


Capturing and reporting on learning from complaints



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Welcome to this guide

This guide explains how to capture and keep an appropriate record of complaints data and insight, and how to use that information to:

- meet your legal and regulatory requirements
- determine how well your organisation, and any organisations you are the parent department of, perform when dealing with complaints and delivering the Complaint Standards
- identify emerging themes and issues so that you can act promptly
- identify learning and create SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound) action plans to help you improve services
- make sure that learning is embedded
- demonstrate that you have learnt from complaints you have received and have improved services on an individual level and on a wider scale
- share learning in your own organisation and more widely.

This is one of the Good complaint handling guides, designed to help you meet the [UK Central Government \(UKCG\) Complaint Standards](#). Read it alongside the [Model complaint handling procedure](#) and other [Good complaint handling guides](#).

What guidance and standards are relevant to this guide?

- The [Complaint Standards](#) set out expectations to help you deliver good complaint handling in your organisation.
- The [Data Protection Act](#) and [UK General Data Protection Regulations](#) cover how organisations should capture, record and use data and personal information.
- The Treasury's [Managing Public Money](#) gives guidance on how UK Central Government should handle remedy.
- Cabinet Office [guidance on preparing annual reports and accounts](#) gives advice on specific reporting requirements for complaints as part of an annual report.

What the Complaint Standards say

Promoting a learning culture

- Appropriate governance structures are in place so that senior leaders regularly review information that arises from complaints and are held accountable for using the learning to improve services. There are clear processes in place to show how organisations do this, and this information is included in their annual reports.
- Organisations put appropriate measures in place to capture feedback about the complaints process from service users who make complaints and from colleagues directly involved. They use this to demonstrate how the organisation has performed towards meeting the Complaint Standards.
- Parent departments have meaningful strategic oversight of how their related organisations are performing. They know how these organisations handle complaints and how they meet the expectations set out in the Standards.

What Managing Public Money says

At Annex 4, Managing Public Money says:

A4.14.3 - Public sector organisations should seek to learn from their complaints. If an internal or external review, or a PHSO investigation, shows there are systemic faults, defective systems or procedures should be overhauled and corrected.

A4.14.17 Reporting ex gratia payments - Departments should ensure that ex gratia payments have estimate cover, and that the ambit of the vote concerned is wide enough for the purpose. Ex gratia payments score as special payments in departments' accounts. Departments and agencies should include summary information on compensation payments arising from maladministration in their annual reports.

What the Cabinet Office guidance on preparing the Annual Report and Accounts says

Section 27 of the Cabinet Office guidance on preparing the Annual Report and Accounts says:

27 Complaints to the Parliamentary Ombudsman

27.1 In response to a recommendation from the Public Administration Parliamentary Select Committee, departments are required to publish information on complaints in the ARAs. Departments should provide a clearly sign-posted section or sub-section on complaints about the department by the Parliamentary Ombudsman.

27.2 Departments should include information from the latest published Parliamentary Ombudsman's Annual Report on the following (where it is applicable):

- i. The number of complaints accepted for investigation by the Parliamentary Ombudsman in the year;
- ii. The number of investigations reported on by the Parliamentary Ombudsman in the year and the percentage of those reports where the complaint was:
 - upheld in full;
 - upheld in part; or
 - not upheld;
- iii. The number of Ombudsman recommendations:
 - complied with; and
 - not complied with.

27.3 Departments should make clear the financial year that the data covers as the Ombudsman's timescales may be different to the timescale covered by the other required information in this reporting round.

27.4 In addition to the specific data above, departments should set the numbers above in context by providing one or two short general paragraphs on complaints more widely. It is for departments to decide what content to include here but, for example, it may include a statement on the department's approach or procedures for dealing with complaints, the overall numbers of complaints dealt with and the cost to the department of doing so, together with any contact information or supplementary data to that taken from the Ombudsman's latest published report.

What you need to do

This section takes you through the information and data you should capture and analyse from the complaints you receive. This is about using data to:

- create action plans
- help your organisation learn from complaints
- share learning with others
- report on learning in your annual report.

Capturing the right data

You should have a system that you can use to capture the data that you must share in your annual report. This data includes:

- the number of complaints you received – you can break this down into areas or different services
- the number of complaints where you found that something went wrong
- a summary of the issues raised in each complaint to help you identify themes or trends
- any action taken to put things right for the person who complained and to improve services for others, with details of the person responsible for the action
- the number of complaints referred to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman
- important issues that arose from complaints or complaint handling.

You should capture data on the performance of your complaints service, including:

- the number of complaints resolved using an ‘early resolution’ approach and the average time it took to resolve them
- the number of complaints considered through a ‘closer look’ approach and the average time it took to resolve them
- percentage of complaints dealt with within the timescale that you shared with the person who made the complaint at the start of the process
- feedback on your complaints service to demonstrate that you are meeting the expectations set out in the Complaint Standards from:
 - people who have complained and those that support them
 - any colleagues or members complained about and involved in the complaints process, and
 - those delivering your complaints service.

It is also sensible to look at all sources of feedback on your service so that you can compile a complete picture of how your service is performing. This additional insight could include:

- compliments, thanks and positive feedback
- claims data
- staff surveys
- feedback from advocacy providers
- social media comments
- data from staff grievances
- whistleblowing

You may also want to capture and review demographic data on the people who use your service and who raise complaints. This will help make sure that your services, and in particular your complaint service, are accessible and meet their needs. You should regularly engage with representatives from across your community to gather their views and feedback on how you are doing.

Please see the practical tools section for examples of [reporting templates and tools](#).

Using the data: roles and responsibility

Senior colleagues are accountable for using learning from complaints to improve services and, as part of this, must regularly review the information that arises from complaints.

They should also have meaningful strategic oversight of any organisations that provide services on their organisation's behalf. This will make sure that everyone is meeting the expectations set out in the Complaint Standards.

A review of complaints data, and the resulting insight, should be a regular standing agenda item at senior leadership or board meetings.

A senior member of the organisation, such as a chief executive or non-executive board member, should be responsible for making sure that the organisation learns from complaints. They should:



familiarise themselves with the UK [Central Government Complaint Standards](#)



ensure that the organisation, and any organisation providing services on its behalf, has assessed how it is performing against the Standards using the UK Central Government Complaint Standards [organisational assessment tool](#).



make sure that the organisation, and any organisation that provides services on its behalf, has reviewed the [model complaint handling procedure](#) to identify any necessary changes to its own procedure to make sure it meets the expectations of the Complaint Standards

- regularly meet colleagues who deal with complaints to fully understand the issues and barriers the organisation faces when dealing with complaints, and work with colleagues to overcome these
- make sure members of colleagues who deal with complaints are fully supported, resourced and trained to deal with complaints, and know what is expected of them
- confirm that the organisation has a robust system in place for capturing the data discussed in the section above and that appropriate audit and quality checks are in place
- Regularly review the data (at least quarterly) to identify key themes and issues and any matters of general importance
- make sure that, where failings are identified, there is a clear action plan for how the matter has been/will be put right for the individual and, if appropriate, how the learning has been/will be embedded to improve services and what that will look like once completed (see section below for further detail)
- regularly review action plans to ensure that they are being/have been completed appropriately
- review the feedback received on the organisation's complaint handling and periodically meet people who have made a complaint, and those that support them, such as advocacy providers, and colleagues who have been complained about, to identify areas for improvement.

Learning from complaints: action plans

If you identify learning from a complaint, put a clear plan of action in place. This will demonstrate to individuals and the wider community that you have listened and learnt from the complaints you receive. Include in your action plans:

- ✓ the specific actions you have taken or plan to take to remedy the failings (and any impact you identified) to stop them happening again
- ✓ the name of the person or team responsible for completing each action

- ✓ when the actions will begin, and when they will be completed
- ✓ how you will make sure that the actions comply with relevant professional or appropriate standards
- ✓ how you will involve the person(s) who has made the complaint (see below)
- ✓ how and when you will review progress against the plan
- ✓ how and when you will review completed actions to make sure they have been successfully completed
- ✓ how you will monitor and audit the actions you have made to make sure any improvements to your service are maintained
- ✓ how you will measure the impact of those actions so that you can clearly prove to the individual(s) and wider community that you have learnt.

Tell the person who has made the complaint about the action you intend to take. Talk to them about how they would like to be kept informed and involved as the actions are carried out. Make sure you capture this in the action plan.

The person may agree to:

- assist with a review of guidance, policies or procedures
- contribute to the development of a training plan
- visit the premises to see changes in action
- share their story as part of organisational learning events or via communication channels or on your website
- take part in any monitoring or audit of the improvements once completed.

The aim is to make sure that the person is satisfied that the actions you have taken, or plan to take, will lead to improvements in service so that the issues they complained about do not happen to anyone else.

Sharing learning with others

The Complaint Standards recommend that you routinely share the learning from your complaints with other organisations (both locally and nationally) to build on insight and best practice. Some of the easiest ways to do that are to:

- publish the learning on your website
- share via your Parent Department or any local or national networks you are part of.

Sharing learning in your annual report

Another way to share learning is in your annual report. The section above details the information you must include in your report but you can, and should, go further than that. You should highlight how you have used the insight from complaints to improve your services. This is a good way to share the learning for others to use. It also sends a clear message to people who use your service, staff and anyone reading it that your organisation takes complaints seriously. It shows that you welcome complaints and are willing to listen, learn and act on what people tell you to put right the mistakes you have made.

You should be proactive about reporting and not wait for people to request it. Publish it on your website and identify your key stakeholders and share your report with them. Your interested stakeholders will include:

- your parent department
- advocacy providers
- colleagues
- national/local community groups
- national/local press.

If you would like this document in a different format, such as Daisy or large print, please [contact us](#).

**Let's make
complaints
count!**

