# Embedding the Complaint Standards: workshop outline for senior leaders

## Introduction

This workshop will help you work with your senior leadership team to:

* reflect on your organisation’s culture around dealing with complaints
* identify the barriers and challenges you face when delivering a good complaints service and what is expected under the NHS Complaint Standards
* communicate what you would like your complaints service to be
* identify goals and actions to improve your complaints service, governance, reporting and learning.

You should:

* set aside three hours for the session
* appoint a suitable senior and qualified person to lead and facilitate the session and capture outputs
* include breaks at appropriate points.

Before holding the workshop, assess your organisation’s current performance against the NHS Complaint Standards using the [organisational assessment tool](https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/organisations-we-investigate/nhs-complaint-standards/nhs-complaint-standards-assessment-matrix). You should share the outcome with all attendees before the session.

If you or your organisation need any help or have questions about this workshop, or the Complaint Standards and supporting materials, please contact the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman’s Stakeholder Engagement Team [(liaisonmanagers@ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:(liaisonmanagers@ombudsman.org.uk)).

## Workshop introduction

Your chief executive, senior partner or equivalent should introduce the session. They should:

* emphasise the important role the leadership team has in making sure the organisation meets the Complaint Standards
* mention creating the right culture around complaints and supporting colleagues to be the best they can when delivering a good complaints service
* include any personal expectations they have for their leadership team.

****Tip: The Complaint Standards guide on [promoting a just culture](https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/organisations-we-investigate/complaint-standards-landing-page-test/nhs-complaint-standards-test/promoting-just-culture) is helpful for this introduction and setting the scene.

## 2. Senior leadership role and responsibilities

### **Activity: flip chart or table work**

Question: As a senior leadership team what do we think are our key responsibilities when it comes to delivering a good complaints service?

****Tip: The conversation should highlight and include what is legally required of the responsible person under the NHS Complaint Regulations and what is expected of senior leaders under the Complaint Standards. See the ‘Five things you can do as a leader’ section in the guide for senior leaders.

## 3. Creating the right culture

### Introduction to creating the right culture

This activity is to help the senior leadership team demonstrate its commitment to learning from complaints to the rest of the organisation.

Suggested introduction to the activity:

The role of a good senior leader goes much wider than what is required by the NHS Complaint Regulations. As senior leaders we set the tone and culture for everyone in our organisation. The things we say and do will be the big difference between a culture that is healthy and committed to learning from complaints, and one where our staff are afraid to speak up and make mistakes for fear of being blamed.

### Activity: room discussion

**Question:** What can we do as individuals or as a team to show all staff that we are committed to delivering a good complaints service, learning from mistakes and supporting staff when things go wrong?

Suggestions and prompts to help discussion:

* Make sure our values include an expectation that all colleagues welcome complaints and see them as an opportunity to develop and improve services and people.
* Make sure our values include an expectation that all colleagues will speak out and be open and honest when something goes wrong and give meaningful apologies.
* Set clear expectations and individual performance measures to embed an open, accountable and non-defensive approach to dealing with and learning from complaints.
* Regularly talk to colleagues, service users and the people who support them about their experiences and listen to their views on the services you provide.
* Properly resource and train all staff involved in investigating complaints to carry out fair investigations that reflect the experiences of everyone involved.
* Make sure we are regularly visible to all staff, talk to them about their experiences and play an active part in complaint handling.
* Make sure that any colleague complained about is supported through the process and, where mistakes have been made, helped to learn from them without fear of blame.
* Establish appropriate central governance and reporting structures that bring together all sources of feedback on our service, including complaints, claims and patient safety.
* Be accountable for the mistakes our organisation makes and for acting on and implementing learning identified.
* Regularly talk to colleagues at all levels about what we have personally learned from complaints and how we have used that learning to improve what we do and the services we provide.
* Share learning and best practice with other organisations.

## 4. Barriers and challenges to delivering a good complaints service

### Activity: flip chart

**Question one:** What are the barriers and challenges our organisation faces when it comes to delivering a good complaints service?

****Tip: Make a note of each challenge on the left-hand side of the flip chart leaving space on the right.

**Question two**: If money and time were not an issue, how would we overcome these barriers and challenges?

****Tip: Make a note of the suggestion alongside each barrier or challenge.

## 5. What would good look like?

### Activity: individual table work

Ask each table to consider the questions below and answer from one perspective. Capture thoughts and suggestions.



**Question:** What would a good complaints culture and service look and feel like in our organisation from:

* our perspective as senior leaders
* the perspective of our staff
* the perspective of our service users
* the perspective of our complaints team or those who deal with complaints?

Ask each table to then feedback their highlights or main points.



## 6. Making good complaint handling a reality

### Activity: flip chart and all-room discussion

**Question:** As leaders, what can we do now to make at least some of those things a reality?

****Tip: Capture suggestions. Refer to the overcoming barriers discussion to start making a list of actions. You can use the action planning templates below to collate all suggestions for team actions and individual actions.

## Session takeaways: senior leadership team action plan

As a leadership team what are your top priorities for meeting the Complaint Standards?

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Issue we want to address** | **Action we will take** | **Proposed action owner** | **Estimated completion date** | **How we will monitor progress** | **Outcome we would like** | **How we will evidence or show**  **improvement** |
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## Session takeaways: your action plan

What actions are you personally going to commit to after today’s session?

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Issue I want to address** | **Action I will take** | **I will need help from** | **Estimated completion date** | **How I will monitor my progress** | **Outcome I would like** | **How I will evidence or show**  **my improvement** |
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