

Quality and Service Standards

The Office of the Complaints Commissioner (OCC) is committed to meeting the standards of the Ombudsman Association Service Standards Framework.

(https://www.ombudsmanassociation.org/docs/OA17_Service_Standards_2017_Final.pdf)

We show how we do this below.

Accessibility

| What the framework says | How does OCC achieve this? |
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| Members' service should be free to complainants | We provide a free service. |
| Members should ensure their procedures are customer focused | <p>We ensure our procedures are customer focused through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training staff on reasonable adjustments; • Reviewing the content of our website annually; • Ensuring our service is confidential and impartial; • Analysis of data from the customer satisfaction survey. |
| Members should work with complainants to understand their needs, in order for complainants to access their services easily | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We provide training to staff on reasonable adjustments; • We provide a range of methods for accessing our service – email, telephone, letters, and face to face in exceptional circumstances; • We use a user satisfaction survey which asks respondents to rate the ease |

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| | with which they could access our service. |
| Members should make reasonable efforts to support access to their services for any user, including working with representatives and others to support complainants through their service, and publish their procedures for doing this. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We publish our policy on reasonable adjustments; • We accept complaints from representatives and advocates acting on behalf of the person affected. |
| Members should listen to what complainants want from them and ensure they understand their complaint. If a complainant is complaining about an organisation or issue that the member cannot consider complaints about, where possible they should direct the complainant to the relevant Association member, or another organisation who may be able to help | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a complaint is misdirected to our service, we point the complainant in the right direction; • We strive to understand the complaints brought to us and the outcomes sought by complainants. We issue preliminary reports when we have gathered the evidence to enable the complainant and the regulator to comment. This provides a further opportunity to ensure we have properly understood the complaint. • Our published guidance on jurisdiction (the Complaints Scheme) helps investigative staff to reach confident decisions about whether we have jurisdiction to investigate complaints. |

Communication

| What the framework says | How does OCC achieve this? |
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| | We publish our service standards and time targets and monitor on our performance against them. We: |

Members should clearly explain to service users their process for handling complaints and likely timescales

- **Respond to initial emails within three working days;**
- **Return telephone calls within two working days;**
- **Update complainants every four weeks;**
- **Acknowledge 95% of correspondence within three working days, answer 95% of telephone calls within two working days, update 95% of complainants at least every four weeks.**
- **The OCC aims to complete our preliminary investigations of complaints and issue a preliminary report to both the complainant and regulator respond to complaints within 90 days of receiving all the necessary information. However, the time it takes to resolve a complaint can vary depending on the complexity of the case**
- **75% within 12 weeks from receipt of receiving all the necessary information.**
- **85% within 20 weeks from receipt of receiving all the necessary information.**
- **98% within 52 weeks from receipt of receiving all the necessary information.**

To allow both the complainant and the regulator 3 weeks to provide a response to the Commissioner’s preliminary report.

- **Requests for additional time to respond to the preliminary report made by either party will be considered and granted where reasonable.**
- **Where both parties respond prior to the outlined response date the Commissioner may use their discretion to complete their final report at an earlier date.**

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| | <p>To complete the final report within 3 weeks from the final date given to both the complainant and the regulator to provide their responses to the preliminary report. Where the Commissioner will not meet this timeframe both parties will be informed.</p> <p>Refer complainants to our website which explains the process.</p> |
| <p>Members should keep service users regularly informed of the progression of their case, and how long things are likely to take</p> | <p>We update complainants every four weeks.</p> |
| <p>Members should be accurate in their communications with service users using plain and clear language</p> | <p>We achieve this through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailoring our communications to be Plain English; • Regular quality checking of reports ; • Team meeting briefings/staff training. |
| <p>Members should let complainants know what they can and cannot do, and, if they are unable to help them explain why</p> | <p>We explain our role in clear simple terms, and what we cannot help with (website, acknowledgement emails and reports).</p> |
| <p>Members should treat service users courteously, respectfully and with dignity</p> | <p>We ensure that we treat service users with courtesy, respect and dignity through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Casework briefings; • Staff training; • Analysis of user satisfaction survey responses. |
| <p>Members should explain their role to service users</p> | <p>Our role is clearly explained on our website.</p> |
| <p>Members should communicate with complainants through a complainant's own chosen method where possible</p> | <p>We currently accept complaints by email, letter, telephone or exceptionally face to face. We respect complainants' choice of communication wherever practicable.</p> |

Professionalism

| What the framework says | How does OCC achieve this? |
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| <p>Members should ensure that the staff who consider complaints have the relevant knowledge, training and skills to make decisions, or have access to suitable professional advice</p> | <p>We achieve this through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment of suitably qualified staff; • Induction programmes for new investigators; • Staff training; • Regular discussions between investigators; • Staff participation in OA forums; • Casework briefings; • Guidance on jurisdiction and remedies; • Legal advice where appropriate |
| <p>Members should deal with complaints in a timely manner, taking into account the complexity of the case.</p> | <p>We publish our service standards and time targets and monitor and report on them .</p> |
| <p>Members should ensure that remedies are appropriate and take account of the impact any identified faults have had on the complainant</p> | <p>We achieve this through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting our views on remedies with the regulators; • Reviewing compliance with remedy by the regulators; • Casework briefings; • Post-decision reviews; • Analysis of data from the users' satisfaction survey; • Analysing the impact of published decisions and special publications. |
| <p>Members should use the outcomes of complaints to promote wider learning and improvement to the service and the sector complained about</p> | <p>We achieve this through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication of thematic reviews in our annual report; • Providing briefing sessions for regulators' staff; • Suggesting remedies to address wider systemic issues discovered during the course of investigations; • Monitoring regulators' compliance with suggestions and recommendations. |

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| Members should ensure their record keeping is accurate and that they hold data securely. | We analyse and record data breaches. |
| Members should ensure that if and when sharing of information is necessary, it is done appropriately. | <p>We do this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing guidance to staff on redacting documents; • Asking the regulators to check for confidentiality issues before a report is issued when necessary; • Reporting to the ICO if we think a data breach has occurred and informing service users. |
| Members should follow their published processes when dealing with complaints about their own service, and they should acknowledge and apologise for any mistakes they make | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We analyse data for our performance against service standards. • We apologise when we have not met our service standards. |
| Members should actively seek feedback about their service and use it to improve | <p>We achieve this through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sending satisfaction surveys to complainants after we have issued a decision on their complaint; • We are hoping to send surveys to the regulators on a biannual basis in 2020. |

Fairness

| What the Framework says | How does OCC achieve this? |
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| Members should work with service users without discrimination or prejudice | <p>We achieve this through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working to the Nolan Principles – cases are evaluated based on the facts and we are not biased towards either the complainants or the regulators; • Unconscious bias and other training; • Quality monitoring of casework; • Analysis of data from the customer satisfaction survey. |

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| <p>Members should make decisions on cases based on their independent and impartial evaluation of the relevant evidence</p> | <p>We achieve this through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A policy on how we deal with conflicts of interests; • Our internal Investigation manuals; • Guidance on remedies and jurisdiction published on our website; • casework briefings; • Quality checking of our reports; • Our process for dealing with service complaints; • Our approach to complaint handling – we are not rigid, and engage with complainants throughout the process; • Our Post-Decision Reviews (from April 2019). |
| <p>The reasons for decisions should be documented and explained to relevant parties</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We issue reports to complainants and regulators and have a commitment to publish (almost) all our decisions on our website; • We issue internal reports on complex cases; • We document our decision-making process, all case related discussions documenting the decision process; • Reports undergo quality checks. |
| <p>Members should publish information concerning any opportunities that may exist for service users to challenge their decisions</p> | <p>We explain the process for seeking judicial review where appropriate.</p> |
| <p>Members should make clear to service users their approach to unacceptable behaviour</p> | <p>We provide information on our website setting out our policy on unacceptable behaviour. We also provide internal support to staff on managing unreasonable complainant behaviour.</p> |

Transparency

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| <p>What the framework says</p> | <p>How does OCC achieve this?</p> |
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| Members should publish information about the most senior staff in charge of decisions on complaints within their organisation, including the rules under which members operate | We publish information about the Complaints Commissioner on our website and in our annual report. |
| Members should have procedures in place to deal with any conflicts of interest around the handling of complaints | We have a policy on dealing with conflicts of interest. |
| Members should be transparent about their investigation with the relevant service users | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We share as much of the information as we can subject to confidentiality restrictions; • We publish (almost) all our decisions on our website. |
| Members should publish the learning that can be drawn from the complaints they handle in order to drive service improvement across the sector | <p>Our policy is to publish (almost) all our decisions on our website. In addition, we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish thematic sections on topical issues in the annual report; • Publish the recommendations which the regulators have accepted and implemented (from April 2019). |
| Members should provide service users with information explaining the approach they take to handling complaints about their own service | We publish our service complaints policy on our website. |
| Members should explain to complainants the procedures in place about what action can be taken if remedies are not implemented by the organisation complained about | We have procedures in place for following up on remedies and recommendations. |