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Annex 1 - Our Dispute System Design Model

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## 1. About this guide

We hope that this guide will help your organisation to improve its complaints handling process, to the benefit of the organisation, its

## 2. Why is good complaints handling important?

Complaints provide valuable customer feedback and insight from the perspective of the customers who use your products or services. They offer an opportunity to improve your processes and service delivery, helping to maintain or even increase customer loyalty and satisfaction. They can also provide an early warning that something is not working, helping you to identify problems and improve your service provision.

A good complaint handling process can offer many benefits to your organisation. These include:

- Helping you to understand and manage customer expectations
- Increased customer trust, confidence and satisfaction
- Increased customer loyalty
- Reduced disruption to your service provision
- Early warning of possible problems
- Prevention of repeat complaints
- Increased satisfaction and engagement among your staff
- Saving time and money by resolving problems early and efficiently
- An enhanced reputation

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If these benefits are to be achieved, an organisation needs to get its complaints management culture right. It should demonstrate a strong commitment to effective and efficient complaints handling, focused on the needs of its customers. Complaints should be valued as providing important customer feedback, helping the organisation to improve its services. This should come from the top down - senior management should show this commitment, and promote this throughout the organisation, setting a good example for all staff.

This commitment to good complaints handling should be reflected in the organisation's policy and procedures for resolving complaints. It should also be demonstrated by a commitment to providing adequate training, development and support for complaints handling staff to help them to do their job effectively. You can find further information on training and development for staff in section 7 of this guide.

## 3. What is a 'complaint'?

This may seem obvious, but it is important that your organisation has a clear and well understood definition of what a 'complaint' is. This will ensure that everyone within your organisation can clearly

#### 4. **Principles of good complaints handling**<sup>1</sup>

There are a number of fundamental principles which should underpin a good complaint handling process. Good complaints handling should:

## 5. Putting the principles into **practice**

In putting these principles into practice, it is important to consider and understand what consumers want and expect when they make a complaint.

Each individual consumer will have their own views and expectations about how their particular complaint should be dealt with, making it difficult to take a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. However, research shows that consumers would like to see the following from a complaints process<sup>2</sup>:

- To be treated with respect, courtesy and fairness, and as a 'valued customer'
- To be listened to and feel understood
- A recognition that their complaint is individual and unique

While it is important to ensure that a complaints process is accessible to all, it can be particularly challenging to ensure that it meets the needs of vulnerable customers. Vulnerable customers are less likely to make a complaint in the first place, and should be encouraged by organisations to do so, so that it can be ensured that their needs are met.

The British Standard on Inclusive Service Provision (British Standards Institute, 2010) states that organisations should identify 'risk factors' which can make

- Is the process objective and evidence based? If so, is this clearly demonstrated?
- Do complaints handling staff treat complainants fairly and with

## 6. What does a good complaint handling **process** look like?

Bearing in mind the principles and questions set out above, what should a good complaints handling process look like? The intention behind this guide is not to consider the actual mechanics or technical







## 7. Further help and advice

Should you need any further assistance, we would be happy to discuss this with you. The Consumer Dispute Resolution Centre is based within Queen Margaret Business School at Queen Margaret University. We have unrivalled expertise in consumer dispute resolution between individuals and organisations, both public and private. Our unique focus is on understanding consumer perspectives on dispute resolution and developing the idea that users should be at the heart of dispute resolution systems and processes.

A distinctive feature of our approach is our mix of practitioner and academic staff, which allows us to provide clients with the latest insights from both research and practice. We have close links with our colleagues in both the Business School and the Division of Psychology and Sociology, giving us the opportunity to draw on their expertise where their knowledge and insight can add a unique dimension to our work.

We offer a full range of complaints consultancy services, which can be tailored to meet your specific needs. We can undertake a fundamental review or redesign of your complaints system, for



GILL, C., CREUTZFELDT, N., WILLIAMS, J., O'NEILL, S., VIVIAN, N.,  
2017. Confusion, Gaps and Overlaps; A Consumer Perspective on  
Alternative Dispute Resolution Between Consumers and Businesses.  
London: Citizens Advice.

Available from:

## **Further information**

If you are interested in any aspect of our consultancy and