

Toolkit: Embedding the learning

Model Complaints
Resolution Procedure



Version

Version	Description	Date
1.0	First release of guidance	29 July 2026

Introduction

However uncomfortable they are to receive, complaints come under the umbrella of consumer feedback. They are the manifestation of the consumer's wish that some aspect of the service had been handled differently.

Whether born of the motive for individual redress (compensation, a reduction of fees or specific action), of wider improvement for the next consumer along, or a combination of the two, the information that a service provider gets from these processes is valuable.

More than this, for all but the purely vexatious, complaints reflect the trust a consumer still has in their service provider. Otherwise, if there were no faith at all, what benefit would the complaint serve? Through this lens, complaints can be seen as a chance to restore faith, to reward the trust the consumer has demonstrated and to prevent the next consumer along from having the same reason to complain.

We all have services from time to time as consumers that we think should have been better. How often do we do anything about it? For most people, the most we're likely to do, unless there is significant harm or expense, is tell friends and family about our experience, and discourage them from using that company. Some will take the additional step of posting a review or of recording their experience on social media.

On the occasions when the service provider finds out about the review, it's common to see them reaching out to the consumer, asking for a chance to discuss the complaint, with a view to resolving it. For a lawyer to have direct contact from the individual and avoid the court of public opinion, there is an extra incentive to create an environment where the client feels comfortable airing any concerns.

If something needs fixing, find it and fix it

When a complaint comes that highlights a mistake or a failing that you accept should have been avoided, look to go beyond what is needed to resolve that complaint.

It might be a case of feedback to an individual, to a team or office about a particular bad practice, or it could be that a process or standard document would benefit from being amended, so as to prevent a future complaint on the same issue.



Example – feeding it up

Miss I raised a complaint with Firm H. The investigation led to Firm H deciding that it should have told her, at the time of the settlement offer, how much of that settlement offer she would actually receive, after deductions.

The complaint cost Firm H £200 to resolve in compensation, but also the man hours in receiving, logging and resolving the complaint.

Firm H's complaints officer had a meeting with the firm's partners later that month, flagging that this had happened. An agreement was reached that the template letter that's used to share settlement offers would be amended to include a breakdown to show how much the client would ultimately receive. Miss I's complaint might immediately be avoided on hundreds of cases with one action.

In some cases, it might be beneficial to report to the original consumer that changes following their complaint have been made. We commonly see complaint responses where the service provider promises to give feedback to an individual or more generally to “take steps to ensure this doesn't happen again”. Beyond that promise, the confirmation that it actually has been done might well be of considerable reassurance to the consumer.

It won't always be possible or appropriate to take this additional step, but, where it is effective, it has significant customer service potential for a business that relies on word of mouth and repeat custom.

The complaints with merit aren't the only ones you should take action on

Every service provider can recognise that charging twice for the same service is a mistake that they should look to avoid next time. That sort of lesson is easy.

But when a complaint comes that the service provider disagrees with, there still exists room for changes to be made to the business process to prevent repeats. This is particularly true where the consumer is clearly acting in good faith in their recollection of events, however wrong those recollections can be shown to be.



Example – an opportunity to explain at scale

Mr J completes the purchase of his house. He looks back at the correspondence he received and realises that some of the emails he received were in the names of people he can't find on the firm's website. Concerned about whether this affects the validity of the transaction, he raises questions about whether all the work was conducted by qualified people.

In response, Firm K noted that a team of conveyancing executives handle the day-to-day work, supervised by a solicitor. The firm referred him to a line in the client care letter, sent five months earlier, which explained this.

The complaint had no merit and, had Mr J escalated it to LeO, it would have been dismissed as having no prospects of success. However, it was still a complaint that had been made, it still required Firm K to engage with the complaint and it still meant a client was, for a period of time, avoidably unhappy.

Firm K decided to make the conveyancing team situation clearer in its initial information, making the explanation longer and putting it in its own box on page 1 of the client care letter. It also added the explanation on its website, in a section called “How we work”.

Get the infrastructure right

In larger firms, it's common to see a dedicated complaints team or department, separate from the operational, fee-earning side of the business. Whilst the notion of having specialists focusing on that aspect of the work is attractive, it does create the risk that their work will be siloed and that the lessons they learn are either not fed into the operational departments at all, or they aren't fed effectively.

For smaller firms, this tends to be a more natural task. For sole practitioners, it's almost impossible not to do it.

From a purely commercial perspective, any feedback from consumers is a free bit of information that might help make the business more efficient, more effective and more profitable. As such, it's to be valued.

The complaints that come won't always be presented in a way that offers useful feedback. Having people who are looking for the useful business information, in addition to the complaint handling and individual customer service functions, is important. These might be the same people, but a business that is actively looking for ways to improve the service and client experience is one which is more likely to find it.

A firm that values customer service understands the true value of good complaint handling and of good complaint handlers.

Don't forget what's been done well

The nature of complaint handling is that there is inevitably a lot of negativity. Even when things are done well, there can still be complaints about the service.

When feedback comes – whether, in passing, as part of a complaint letter or outside of that – which highlights something that the consumer found particularly good or useful, there is a question as to what the service provider does with that information.

Do you tell the individual member of staff? Do you reward them in some way (financially or otherwise)?

Above all, what do you do to ensure that, every time the same situation comes up in any retainer at your firm, you consider doing the thing that this consumer told you warranted particular praise?

Being told what to do differently is beneficial, but we also benefit from being told what to repeat next time and why it made a difference. These actions can feed into a business's culture and become part of standard practice, whether born of an individual's good decisions or of a complaint.

