



COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY

EXTERNAL CUSTOMERS/CLIENTS - GENERAL PUBLIC

1. BACKGROUND, PURPOSE AND AIM

The Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) has a commitment to the Western Australian Government's customer focus strategy launched in 1994, including customer/client feedback. Under this strategy, the EOC developed its Customer Service Charter in 2000.

The Customer Service Charter invites complaints about our services and states "In order to provide the best possible service, we need to hear from you with any complaints, suggestions for improvement, or praise for services that meet your needs".

To support the customer focus strategy and our Customer Service Charter, the Complaints Handling Policy provides processes and procedures for receiving customer/client feedback in the form of complaints. The EOC also receives customer/client feedback from complainants and respondents (through the Survey of Services) and from participants attending our training courses (through pre and post evaluations).

The purpose of this policy is to establish a complaints management system with the aim of responding to, recording, reporting and using complaints as a mechanism for improving services and products for our customers/clients. The Complaints Handling Policy provides guidelines for complainants and complaint recipients (EOC officers) in accordance with Standards Australia Complaints Handling Standard AS4269-1995 (refer to Attachment "A").

The Complaints Handling Policy provides the framework:

1. to ensure that all complaints are effectively addressed in a consistent and just manner; and
2. to ensure that the information gathered through complaints is utilized to make service improvements including systemic issues and prevent recurring complaints.

The aim of the policy is to:

- support the provision of the highest possible quality services or products to our external customers/clients (general public);
- increase the level of customer/client satisfaction with the delivery of the EOC's services or products; and
- enhance our relationship with our external customers/clients (general public).

2. DEFINITION OF CUSTOMER/CLIENT COMPLAINTS

For the purposes of this policy, a **complaint** is defined as:

Any expression of dissatisfaction received from a customer/client (member of the public), either verbally or in writing, about **any service or product** (for which the EOC is responsible) where the complainant is seeking a specific resolution that requires action to be taken by the EOC to address the “**complaint**”.

For the purposes of this policy, **complaint** does not include expressions of dissatisfaction, concerns or complaints received from the general public in respect to:

- Government policies and/or legislation outside the control of, and not the responsibility of the EOC (Note: information of this nature should be monitored and where considered relevant by the EOC passed on the respective policy makers for their information; or
- “Complaints” that are covered by other formal procedures that must be dealt with separately in accordance with relevant procedures (e.g. Grievance Procedures for complaints of discrimination and harassment under the Equal Opportunity Act or other Public Sector Human Resource Management Standards; the review processes available under the Freedom of Information Act 1992).

3. EOC CUSTOMERS/CLIENTS

The EOC’s customers/clients include:

- External customers/clients (general public) (e.g. people making telephone or face to face inquiries, complainants, respondents, participants attending training/education courses), people who receive our publications, newsletters, etc);
- Primary customers/clients (e.g. the Attorney General and his office, Premier, Cabinet Ministers); and
- Other key customers/clients (e.g. Members of Parliament, Chief Executive Officers, Public Sector Agencies and Public Sector Employees).

4. FORM OF COMPLAINT

A complaint can be made by a member of the public

- orally, (in person or by telephone) or
- lodged as a written complaint (complaint form (External - customer/client – general public), letter, facsimile, or electronically via the EOC’s on-line “Contact Us/Feedback” facility available on our website).

5. COMMITMENT

The EOC is committed to:

- recognising a customer’s/client’s right to make complaints, comments or suggestions about the level and quality of services or products provided;
- encouraging the submission of any complaints customers/clients providing an efficient, fair and accessible mechanism for resolving complaints;
- ensuring that all complaints are heard and equitably resolved as soon as possible;
- monitoring complaints in an endeavour to improve the quality of services or products;
- providing customers/clients with information about the complaint handling

- process; and
- promoting a positive attitude towards customers/clients and the commitment to resolving complaints.

To support the complaint process the EOC will also actively seek feedback from complainants through regular surveys and from training participants through evaluations to ascertain general levels of satisfaction with the level and quality of services or products provided.

6. PRINCIPLES

The EOC, in respect to the following matters, will abide by the principles described below.

- **Fairness:** Recognise the need to be fair and equitable to both the complainant and the officer and/or part of the EOC against whom the complaint is made.
- **Resources:** Provide adequate resources with sufficient levels of delegated authority to ensure complaints received are addressed and concluded in a timely manner.
- **Visibility:** Promote the EOC's Complaints Handling Policy and procedures to all external customers/clients.
- **Access:** Ensure the complaint process is available to all external customers/clients and employees of the EOC.
- **Responsiveness:** Deal with complaints quickly, treat complainants with courtesy and wherever possible resolve complaints at the first point of contact.
- **Assistance:** Provide assistance for complainants in the formulation and lodgement of complaints, if requested.
- **Charges:** If a customer/client has a complaint about a product or service, the complaints handling process will be provided free of charge (subject to statutory requirements).
- **Remedies:** The EOC will review the need to develop remedies that are fair and reasonable in the circumstances, to meet any legal obligations and generally comply with good management principles and practice.
- **Data Collection:** Collect and record data on complaints lodged and outcomes to assist in the identification of systemic and recurring problems and/or potential improvements to service delivery and customer/client relations.
- **Accountability:** All staff shall take responsibility for effective complaint handling. Managers are responsible for implementing the policy and procedures outlined in this document in their respective Branches.
- **Reviews:** Regularly review the complaints handling process to ensure it is efficiently delivering effective outcomes.

7. RIGHTS OF COMPLAINANTS

Fairness - Complainants have rights to:

- be heard;
- be provided with, and request all relevant material to support the complaint, subject to the Freedom of Information Act;
- be informed of the criteria and processes;
- be informed of the response of the officer or part of the EOC complained of;
- be informed of the EOC'S decision and the reasons for that decision;

- know that a genuine, thorough and unbiased examination of the complaint has been undertaken; and
- confidentiality, if requested.

Responsiveness - Complainants shall be:

- advised how long it will take to deal with the complaint (by agreement where possible); and
- be kept informed of progress by telephone advice, correspondence or interview.

8. RIGHTS OF EOC OFFICERS

Dealing Directly with the Complainant – Oral or Written (Formal)

An EOC Officer has rights to:

- obtain sufficient detail about the complaint to enable a proper investigation/review and response to the complaint;
- agree (where possible) with the complainant the time required to provide information to address the complaint;
- agree with the complainant the form the response will take (oral or written); and
- record complaint details, timing and the form of response for reporting purposes (to Manager).

Written Complaints against an EOC Officer

An EOC Officer against whom a complaint has been made has rights to:

- assemble sufficient detail about the complaint to enable the officer to properly respond to the complaint;
- place all relevant material before the relevant officer appointed to review the complaint;
- provide oral and/or written submissions regarding the complaint; and
- be informed of the decision and the reason for the decision.

9. RESPONSIBILITIES OF MANAGERS

Managers shall:

- appoint and empower officers in their Branch with the authority to resolve complaints quickly and effectively;
- provide sufficient resources within their area of control to ensure the efficient and effective management of customer/clients complaints;
- ensure appointed officers are trained in complaint handling skills;
- ensure all complaints are dealt with in an acceptable and timely manner;
- monitor progress of their complaints handling process;
- maintain an appropriate recording of oral and written complaints in the official records file for that branch;
- identify repetitive complaints;
- evaluate the data and determine the causes of complaints and whether remedial action is required; and
- develop and implement continuous improvements to services or products that are the cause of complaints within their area of responsibility; and
- report in the EOC’s Annual Report any significant complaint issues, particularly systemic complaints and those resulting in service improvements.

10. REVIEW

All Managers will be responsible for implementation of this policy. If there are any suggestions for amendments or improvements to this policy, Managers can raise these issues at regular Corporate Executive Meetings.

All Managers will review the policy each year after feedback on the EOC's Annual Report has been received, in consultation with all staff.

STANDARDS AUSTRALIA
COMPLAINTS HANDLING STANDARD AS4269-1995
ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE COMPLAINTS HANDLING

The minimum requirements for a complaints system are:

- 1 **COMMITMENT:** There shall be a commitment to efficient and fair resolution of complaints by people in the organization at all levels, including the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity. Commitment is shown by an organizational culture that acknowledges consumers' rights to complain and which actively solicits feedback from consumers. The policy on complaints handling shall be in writing.
- 2 **FAIRNESS:** A complaints handling process shall recognise the need to be fair to both the complainant and the organization or person against whom the complaint is made.
- 3 **RESOURCES:** There shall be adequate resources for complaints handling with sufficient levels of delegated authority.
- 4 **VISIBILITY:** A complaints handling process shall be well publicised to consumers/clients and staff, and shall include information to consumers about the right to complain.
- 5 **ACCESS:** A complaints handling process shall be accessible to all and ensure that information is readily available on the details of making and resolving complaints. The complaints handling process and supporting information shall be easy to understand and use, and be in plain language.
- 6 **ASSISTANCE:** Assistance shall be available for complainants in the formulation and lodgement of complaints.
- 7 **RESPONSIVENESS:** Complaints shall be dealt with quickly and the complainants shall be treated courteously.
- 8 **CHARGES:** Complaints handling shall be at no charge to the complainant.
- 9 **REMEDIES:** A complaints handling process shall have the capacity to determine and implement remedies.
- 10 **DATA COLLECTION:** There shall be appropriate systematic recording of complaints and implement strategies
- 11 **SYSTEMIC AND RECURRING PROBLEMS:** Complaints shall be classified and analysed for the identification and rectification of systemic and recurring problems.
- 12 **ACCOUNTABILITY:** There shall be appropriate reporting on the operation of the complaints handling process against documented performance standards.
- 13 **REVIEWS:** A complaints handling process shall be reviewed regularly to ensure that it is efficiently delivering effective outcomes.

Paraphrased from Australian Standard Complaints Handline AS4269-1995, page 6

ATTACHMENT "B"
RESPONSIVENESS TO FORMAL (WRITTEN)
CUSTOMER/CLIENT COMPLAINTS

