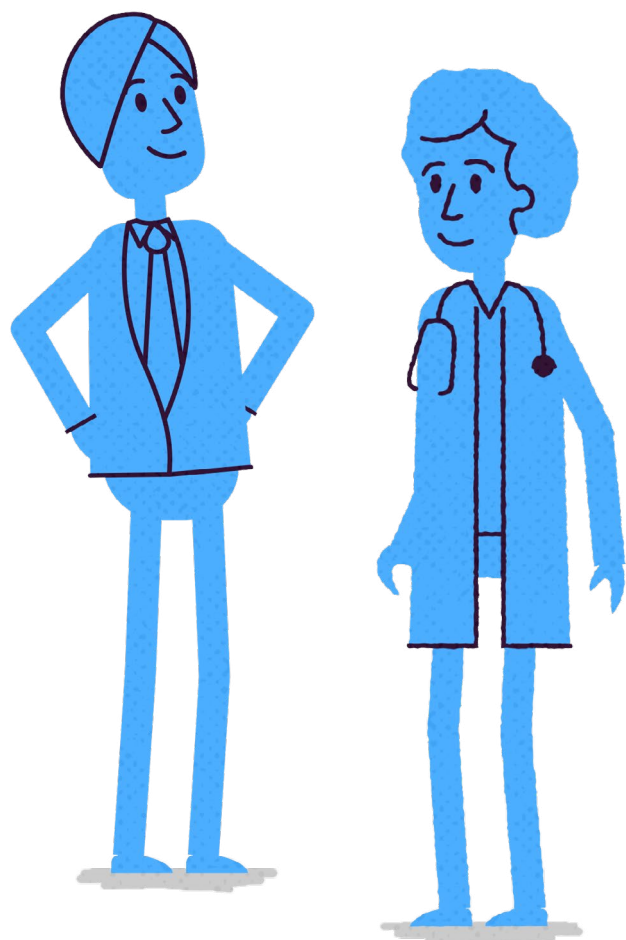


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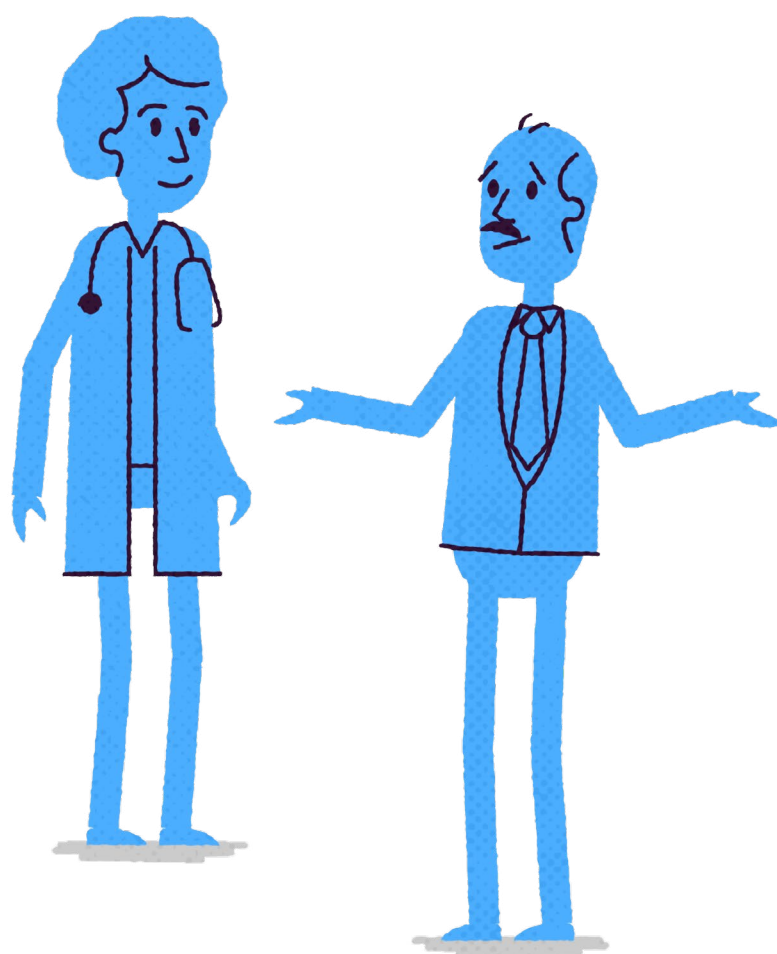


# Complaint Standards Framework:

Summary of core expectations for NHS organisations and staff

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# Executive summary

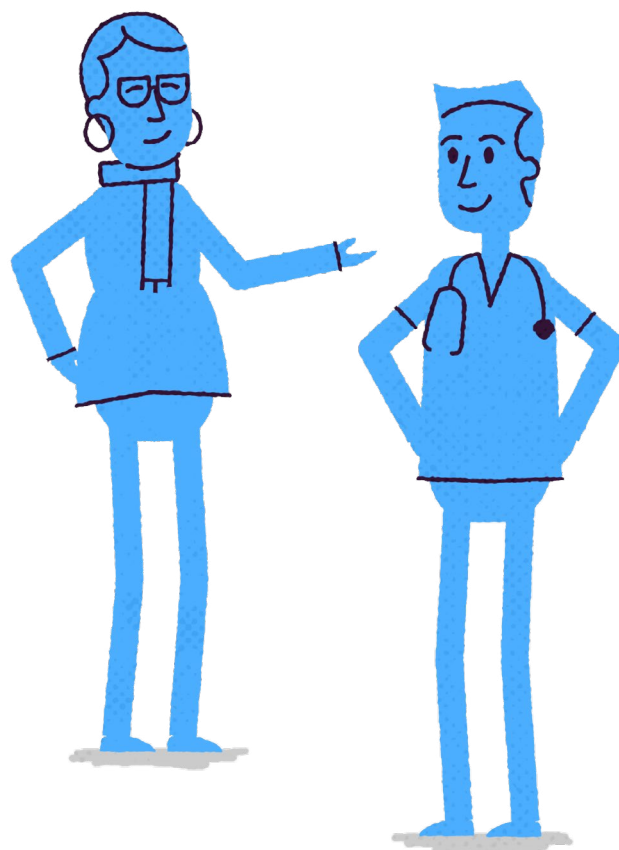
## An effective complaint handling system...

**Promotes a learning and improvement culture** through supporting the entire organisation to see complaints as an opportunity to develop and improve its services and people. It sets clear expectations to embed an open, non-defensive approach to learning from feedback. The organisation regularly talks to its managers and leaders and the public about what it has learnt from feedback and how it has used the feedback to improve services for everyone. Staff receive regular support and training to deliver best practice in handling feedback.

**Positively seeks feedback**, to act on complaints and to recognise this as a positive way to improve services. It creates a positive experience by welcoming feedback and making it easy for people to make a complaint. Staff have the freedom to resolve issues quickly and to the satisfaction of everybody.

**Is thorough and fair** when looking into complaints and gives an open and honest answer as quickly as possible in light of the complexity of the issues. It makes sure people who give feedback - and staff involved in the issues - have their say and are kept updated when carrying out this work. It always makes sure people can see what staff are doing to look into the issues in a fair and objective way based on the facts.

**Gives a fair and accountable decision** about what happened and whether mistakes occurred or not. The decision recognises the experience of everybody concerned to ensure a culture of learning and accountability. The system makes sure staff have the confidence and freedom to offer fair remedies to put things right when needed, and to take action to make sure any learning is identified and acted on to improve services.







## Promoting a learning and improvement culture

An effective complaint system demonstrates its commitment to promoting a just and learning culture that is open and accountable when mistakes occur. It uses learning to improve its services.

It makes sure every member of staff knows their role in promoting a 'learning from complaints' culture. It puts in place clear ways to demonstrate how the organisation uses learning to improve.

- All relevant staff know how they can deliver a just and learning culture in their role via specific objectives. Staff can demonstrate meeting these objectives via practical examples.
- Every organisation has appropriate governance structures in place to ensure that senior staff regularly review information arising from complaints and are held accountable for ensuring the learning taken from feedback is acted upon to improve services.
- Organisations ensure staff are trained to identify complaints in a manner that meets the expectations given in this Framework.
- Organisations have clear processes in place to show how they capture learning from complaints, report on it, and use it to improve services. Organisations report on the feedback they have received and how they have used that feedback to improve their services. This information is easy to compare with that of other organisations.
- Organisations also publish the results of their success in meeting the expectations given in this Standards Framework by seeking feedback from those who raise complaints (as well as staff involved) on their experience. This shows how the organisation has performed towards meeting what users expect to see as described in [My Expectations](#).
- Organisations provide meaningful opportunities for those who use their service (and national and local groups who represent those users) to discuss how the organisation has used learning from complaints to improve local services.
- Organisations routinely share learning from complaints with other organisations (both locally and nationally) to build on insight and best practice.



## Positively seeking feedback

An effective complaint system goes out of its way to create a positive environment in which complaints are welcomed and resolved at the earliest opportunity. People know how to complain and can do this easily and without fear that it will affect their care.

People have confidence that their complaint will be taken seriously, will be looked at with empathy and will be answered as quickly as possible.

- All staff have the freedom to actively seek feedback to improve services and resolve issues quickly and effectively. Staff receive training in how to do this and how to ensure people know they are being listened to and treated with empathy, courtesy and respect.
- Organisations make sure people know how to access advice and support to make a complaint, including giving details of appropriate independent complaints advocacy and advice providers and other support networks.
- Organisations ensure staff who are subject to a complaint are made aware and know how to get access to advice and support throughout the process.
- Organisations actively reassure people who use their services that their care will not be compromised if they make a complaint.
- Organisations clearly advertise how people can raise complaints in a way that suits them. Organisations offer a range of ways people can give feedback, including online.
- Organisations make it easy for anyone to make a complaint when they want to. It is easy for everybody to understand how the process works, including who can make a complaint and what will happen next.
- Each stage in the complaints procedure is responsive to the needs of each individual. Every stage meets the needs of minority and vulnerable groups and makes reasonable adjustments where required.
- Organisations ensure staff identify when issues raised in a complaint might be better addressed via another route (such as through a regulator or by a legal claim). Staff provide advice on how a person can take that route (and where they can get further support) so they can make an informed choice. Staff will continue to look into any issues that are not covered by another route to ensure people get a complete answer to their complaint.
- Staff make sure they respond to complaints at the earliest opportunity. Staff consistently meet expected timescales for acknowledging a complaint and give clear timeframes for how long it will take to look into the issues, taking into account the complexity of the matter.
- Organisations regularly promote their wish to receive feedback from their users and promote how they use this learning to improve services.

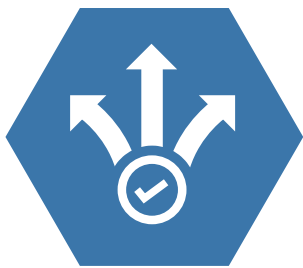


## Being thorough and fair

An effective complaint system makes sure staff take a thorough, proportionate and balanced look into the issues raised by a complaint, and makes sure people get a fair and open answer to their questions based on the facts and takes full accountability for mistakes identified.

- Organisations make sure staff are properly trained and have the appropriate level of experience and authority to take a thorough look into complaints.
- Organisations make sure all staff who look at complaints have the appropriate resources, support and protected time to do so in order to consistently meet the expectations given in this Framework.
- All staff handling complaints do so impartially. Where possible, organisations make sure they assign complaints to staff who have had no prior involvement or who have no actual or perceived conflict of interest. Where that is not possible, staff take clear steps to demonstrate their impartiality and how they will avoid any conflict of interest.
- Organisations publish a local complaints procedure that meets the standards set out in this Framework. Each procedure clearly sets out how staff will handle complaints and what quality standards and behaviours they are expected to follow when doing so.
- Staff actively listen and demonstrate a clear understanding of what the key issues are for the individual, and what outcomes they seek.
- Staff make sure everyone involved in a complaint (including staff) know how they will look into the issues. This includes what information complaints staff will need, who they will speak to, who will be responsible for making the final decision and how they will communicate that decision.
- Staff will agree timescales with everyone involved and will agree how people will be kept informed and involved. Staff provide regular updates throughout.
- At all times, staff have the freedom to look for ways they can resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity.
- Staff make sure everyone involved in a complaint has the opportunity to give their views and respond to emerging information. Staff act openly and transparently and with empathy when discussing this information and make sure they take everyone's comments into account.
- In complaints that involve multiple organisations, local complaints procedures identify and set out the roles and responsibilities of a 'lead organisation' and the other organisations involved to deliver a co-ordinated investigation and a holistic response.





## Giving fair and accountable decisions

An effective complaint system makes sure organisations enable staff to give a fair and balanced account of what happened and what conclusions they reached on every complaint.

When appropriate, organisations openly identify times when things have gone wrong or services have had an unfair impact and take accountability for these.

Organisations ensure staff can offer a range of ways to put things right for the individual. Staff also look at what action will be taken to learn from the experience to continuously improve services and help support staff.

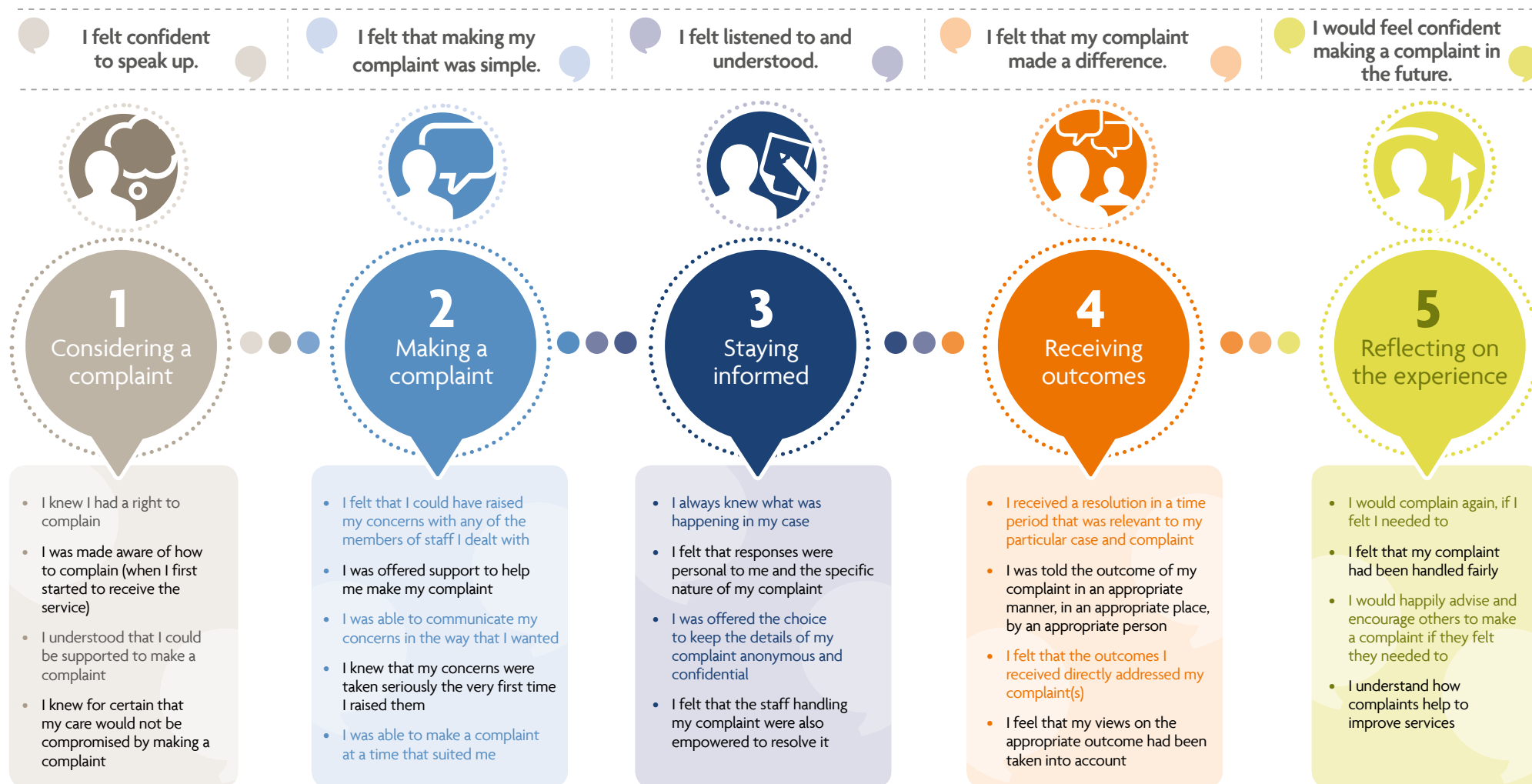
- Staff give a clear, balanced account of what happened based on established facts. Each account compares what happened with what should have happened, and gives clear references to any relevant standards, policies or guidance, based on objective criteria.
- Staff give everybody involved in a complaint meaningful opportunities to respond to initial views and take these into account in the final decision.
- Organisations ensure staff have the confidence to be open and honest when things have gone wrong or where improvements can be made. Staff

ensure the right balance between taking accountability and identifying what learning can be taken from a complaint and how the learning will be acted on to improve services and support staff.

- Wherever possible, staff explain why things went wrong and identify suitable ways to put things right for people when mistakes have occurred. Staff should ensure the apologies and explanations they give are meaningful, sincere, and openly reflect what impact the mistake has had. Staff take human factors into account, and ensure any learning is acted upon. Staff use any learning to support staff complained about.
- Organisations empower staff to identify suitable ways to put things right for those raising complaints. Organisations provide guidance and resources to make sure any proposed action to put things right is consistent with others.
- For complaints that involve multiple organisations, the lead organisation provides a single response to the complaint that includes what the other organisations have done to look into the issues and the conclusions they reached. Where needed, the response clearly explains how each organisation will remedy any mistakes it made.
- Organisations make sure people are kept involved and updated on how the organisation is taking forward all learning or improvements relevant to their complaint.
- Staff make sure everyone is told about their right to complain to the Ombudsman in the written final response to a complaint.



# A user-led vision for raising concerns and complaints



If you would like this document in a different format, such as Daisy or large print, please contact us.

[www.ombudsman.org.uk/csf](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk/csf)

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