

Complaints: When Things Go Wrong

INTRODUCTION

“Instead of fearing it, negative feedback should be welcomed.”

“Mistakes are going to happen. Acknowledge them. Rectify them. Learn from them. Move on.”¹

Everyone has the right to expect a good service from public bodies, and to have things put right if they go wrong.² There is nothing like a real or alleged error to stimulate the flow of adrenaline, initiating the fight-or-flight response: in many cases, complaints can lead to feelings of fear and self-doubt. This module aims to minimise these negative experiences.¹

This module will study

- the common patterns which emerge when complaints are researched
- how to deal with a complaint – informal and formal
- how to prevent complaints from escalating from an informal complaint to a formal one

The information section will include advice on

- active listening to complaints and how to reply – evidence has shown that the way one responds is a key factor in the complaint outcome¹
- how to apologise – saying “sorry” without sounding defensive³
- learning from complaints and therefore improving the service you provide
- developing a Complaints Procedure - in many of the complaints investigated by the Ombudsman poor complaint handling itself became the problem, even in cases in which the Ombudsman did not uphold the original complaint.²
- addressing all the issues raised in a complaint in the substantive response - dealing with contentious/difficult aspects even if it is a fairly minor matter⁴
- liaising with other disciplines which may be involved and formulating a single response.