



Policy on Handling Compliments, Complaints and Other User Feedback

Executive Support

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Introduction

The following policy on handling compliments, complaints and other user feedback replaces the *Policy on Handling Compliments, Complaints and Other User Feedback* (Administrative Circular dated December 2014).

Policy Aims

This policy aims to describe the policy and supporting procedures regarding the handling of user feedback made directly to the Library.

This policy is not intended to cover:

- feedback directly solicited by the Library through surveys, focus groups, user forums, visitor books or other indirect comment referred to through social media forums;
- requests for information made and to be managed under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*; or
- allegations of illegal conduct to be managed under the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013*.

Background

User service concepts are well understood and reinforced within the Library. We take pride in our services and want to ensure that clients consider that it is worthwhile using the Library's services and engaging with us.

Our service delivery is client-focused and to this end we constantly aim to improve services through interaction and consultation with users as well as monitoring the effectiveness of our operations. This client focused ethic is central to the work of staff in both supporting and front-end roles and the Library recognises that service standards should be applied to both external and internal clients.

While we always intend to deliver quality services and keep our users satisfied by doing the job right the first time, we recognise that some client's expectations will not always be met. We encourage the right of clients to provide us with their suggestions and complaints. Effective complaints handling ensures that such feedback can be used to continue improving service delivery.

The Library has adopted for its policy on complaints handling, the framework suggested by the Australian/New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 10002:2014 *Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organizations* (29 October 2014).

This policy has also been informed by the *Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling* issued by the Commonwealth Ombudsman in 2009, together with the recommendations of the investigation report *Complaint Management by Government Agencies* (Commonwealth Ombudsman, October 2014).

The Library also refers staff to the Commonwealth Ombudsman *Better Practice Guide to Managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct* (2012).

Complaints and Compliments Workflow Review

In August 2017, the IT Division conducted a review of the complaints and compliments workflows, to address duplication in re-entering data from divisional databases (eg Refracker) to the stand-alone User Feedback Database. The IT Team identified and made minor improvements to the User Feedback Database reporting functions and implemented a new export function to enable data to be selected and transferred from the Division 2 Refracker to the User Feedback Database.

Values

The Library is committed to the [Australian Public Service Code of Conduct](#) and the [APS Values](#).

Definitions

Complaint For the purpose of reporting complaints to the User Feedback Database and for annual reporting, the Library defines “complaint” using a modified definition from

[AS/NZS 10002:2014](#) as:

a formal expression of dissatisfaction or unmet expectation made to the Library, related to its services, facilities, staff or the client feedback process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

For purposes of clarification, requests under the *Freedom of Information Act 1968* or allegations of illegal conduct (a public interest disclosure) are not complaints.

Compliment A compliment would be one given by a user in a formal manner, at extra effort and related to a publicly available library service. Therefore simple expressions of gratitude, praise or appreciation for normal services, such as a brief ‘thank you for your help’ or ‘the exhibition was great’ should not be recorded as a compliment in the User Feedback Database. Similarly cross divisional expressions of gratitude for services provided between staff members should not be recorded in the database.

Suggestion Suggestions can often lead to improvements to existing services or implementation of new services. They may not necessarily express dissatisfaction or implicitly or explicitly require a response. For example suggestions for a book purchase, an exhibition theme etc.

Vexatious complaint A complaint made maliciously, made in an aggressive, abusive or threatening manner, sometimes made without evidence or made seeking unreasonable demands or persistence. For example refusing to accept an outcome, apology or resolution and continuing to pursue a complaint without presenting any new information.

Policy statement

Commitment

- The Library believes that providing its users with the opportunity to offer suggestions and comments, both criticism and praise, will lead to improvement in services.
- The Library will treat all parties to a complaint with fairness, professionalism, transparency, impartiality and confidentiality, and will provide reasons for decisions made.
- The Library will accept anonymous complaints and suggestions. However in the case of an anonymous complaint, unless the matter is considered sufficiently serious or there are reasonable grounds or sufficient evidence provided, the matter is unlikely to be pursued further.

- The Library will handle all complaints received in accordance with the Australian Privacy Principles of the *Privacy Act 1988*, specifically when collecting, storing, using and disclosing personal information obtained in complaint handling.

Accessibility

- The Library facilitates the process of user feedback by providing avenues for comment via a publicly accessible feedback box, online enquiry form, and providing hardcopy feedback forms in public areas.
- Clients are informed how to provide user feedback by means of our *Service Charter*. As the need arises the Library will readily provide further advice on the best manner to offer comment on services and facilities.

Responsiveness

- The Library attempts to deal with, and if possible, resolve all complaints and suggestions in a speedy manner. Where contact details are provided an acknowledgement, resolution or explanation will normally be provided within one week of receipt.
- For some complaints and suggestions it may not be possible to resolve the matter or notify the complainant within one week. In these cases the Library will acknowledge the receipt of a complaint within one week, as specified in the Library's Service Charter, and provide an explanation or resolution as soon as possible.
- Staff, particularly those in front line service areas, will be provided with appropriate support, authority and training to address complaints.
- The Library will consider within each Division's complaints handling processes, suitable remedies for complaint resolution, however, each Division will ensure all defined complaints and compliments are centrally recorded in the Library's User Feedback Database.

Charges

- There will be no fee associated with complaint handling other than that determined by statutory requirements.

Data Collection and Continual Improvement

- Systematic recording of complaints, compliments and suggestions received throughout the Library will be by means of a centralised database, the User Feedback Database. It is the responsibility of each Division to ensure feedback is responded to promptly and recorded accurately in the centralised User Feedback Database.
- User feedback will be analysed in order for the Library to make continual service improvements and to ensure its complaints handling policies and procedures are responsive.

Accountability and Reviews

- User service concepts are well understood and reinforced within the Library. A strong service ethic and culture is encouraged. The Library constantly aims to improve services through interaction and consultation with users as well as monitoring the effectiveness of its operations.
- To ensure appropriate complaint resolutions and responses, Branch Managers will clear all responses to complainants. This will also ensure ongoing monitoring of complaints handling.
- Care should be taken to ensure complaint responses address the issues referred to in the feedback.
- Analysis of complaints and compliments will be provided to the Corporate Management Group on a quarterly basis. The reports, which do not include any personal details, will outline the nature of the complaints, how they were managed and steps taken to resolve any systemic problems.

- The Executive Branch is responsible for monitoring and reporting on user feedback. Information on user feedback received by the Library will be obtained from the User Feedback Database, and where necessary the HP Records Manager.
- To ensure that confidentiality is maintained, access to the User Feedback Database is restricted to database administrators. In general Divisional Support staff (DSUs) are responsible for recording user feedback in the database.
- If there is a particularly sensitive or vexatious matter where strict confidentiality of all parties should be maintained, it is recommended that the complaint and response, excluding all personal details, be summarized in the User Feedback Database. The complete, original records should be archived in HPRM with access restrictions and a HPRM reference number noted in the User Feedback Database.
- As noted above, Freedom of Information requests and allegations of illegal conduct are not considered to be complaints and details should not be entered into the User Feedback Database. All Freedom of Information requested should be immediately referred to the FOI mailbox. Allegations of illegal conduct should be immediately referred to an authorized officer, as per the Public Interest Disclosure (PID) policy.

Dealing with difficult or vexatious complaints

- The Library acknowledges there may be occasions where a client's expectations will not always be met, and this may lead to further responses from them that become unacceptable. It is also recognised that staff have rights that must be respected when dealing with aggressive clients or with vexatious complaints. In such circumstances and after careful consideration of all the facts and issues, or where it has been determined that staff resources are being unnecessarily diverted on a particular issue, Division Head, or their delegate, may initiate steps to minimise or control our dealings with clients engaging in this kind of behaviour.

Key roles and responsibilities

Recording Compliments, Complaints and Suggestions

Staff receive feedback through a range of program mechanisms and in a variety of formats. The flow chart at Appendix A provides an overview of feedback mechanisms, information databases for each Division and the role of the central User Feedback Database. Key points to remember are:

- The Director-General's EA will distribute the printed feedback form and website feedback from to the relevant DSUs or assigned Division coordinator for resolution, response and recording in the User Feedback Database.
- In some Divisions, complaints, compliments and suggestions may be received via an online enquiry form, for example Refracker or the Catalogue Feedback Form. In these cases, the reference enquiry form or other identifier should also be recorded in the User Feedback Database.
- All written feedback and relevant background material received through other mechanisms (letter, email), should also be forwarded to the Divisional Support Units (or assigned coordinator). If a client provides verbal feedback and is unwilling or unable to complete a written form, the staff member should gather the required information from the complainant including their contact details and forward onto the Divisional Support Units (or assigned coordinator).
- It is the responsibility of each Division to ensure a summary of user feedback is recorded promptly in the User Feedback Database. Required information includes:
 - User name and contact details (unless, as noted earlier, this is a sensitive or vexatious matter, where strict confidentiality of all parties should be maintained)
 - how complaint was received (mail, online enquiry form, social media, email, telephone or

- in person)
- o date of receipt of complaint
- o nature of the complaint
- o services, practices or products about which the complaint were made
- o action taken to resolve complaint and name of action officer
- o date user notified of outcome of complaint
- o date of any further approaches by complainant relating to a matter
- o HPRM or Reftracker reference number for access to correspondence
- As a minimum, the User Feedback Database should be updated quarterly to allow the Director-General's EA to provide reports to the Corporate Management Group, although Division Heads can request reports at any time.
- The due date for input to the quarterly Corporate Management Group report is the third Wednesday of the month following the financial quarter. For example, input for the January-March 2018 quarter is 18 April: input for the April-June 2018 quarter is 18 July etc.

Complaint Handling Process

When responding to a complaint, staff should consider the steps below, based on the Commonwealth Ombudsman's *Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling*.

Acknowledge

As noted, the Library aims to respond to the majority of complaints within a week. If a response cannot be provided within a week, an acknowledgement should be provided, usually via email however in some cases it may be more efficient to explain the process over the telephone.

Assess

All staff who receive complaints should discuss the matter with their Branch Manager first and in the case of complex and/or high risk complaints, the proposed responses should also be discussed with the Division Head.

Where a complainant refers to one or multiple concerns involving cross divisional responsibilities the relevant Branch Managers should discuss and agree on a coordinated response.

It may be necessary to assign a higher priority to selected complaints. For example, there might be a dispute that if not dealt with immediately, will become worse. A sensitive matter that could attract media attention may also call for special and prompt handling.

Plan and Investigate the Complaint (if required)

Complex complaints involving other parties, disputed factors or legal implications will require further investigation, including interviews with other staff or users, or review of Library's policies. All investigations should be elevated to the relevant Branch Manager, who will consult with the senior executive and the Legal Officer, as required.

In conducting investigations, all parties to the complaint should be treated with fairness, professionalism, transparency, impartiality and confidentiality. Further guidance is provided in the Commonwealth Ombudsman better practice guides.

Response

Once the assessment and investigation has been completed, a written response should be prepared, where appropriate referring to Library policies, Regulations and relevant legislation and detailing any new findings or decisions.

Responses should be easily understood, address the concerns raised and take into account the outcome being sought by the complainant. Template style letters should be avoided. Responses may differ across each Division, however suggested remedies may include a better or fuller explanation, an apology, changing or reconsidering a decision or expediting action.

If the claim made by the complainant has not been accepted by the Library, this should be acknowledged and explained.

The response must be cleared by the Branch Manager and the Division Head briefed on any high risk issues.

Follow up

As specified in the Service Charter, the complainant should be briefed on their available options, if they believe the issue has not been resolved. This includes review by the Director-General and referral to the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

Systemic issues

The Executive Branch will provide de-identified reports on user feedback to the Corporate Management Group on a quarterly basis.

The Corporate Management Group will be responsible for ensuring appropriate procedures and processes are in place to ensure all complaints, and suggestions, where appropriate, are responded to in an efficient and timely manner, and that any systemic problems are managed and addressed.

Revision

The mechanisms for handling complaints and other user feedback will be reviewed regularly as part of the review of the effectiveness of the Library's Service Charter.

References and related documents

The following documents were considered when revising this policy

- Standards Australia International. *Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organizations*, Australian/New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 10002-2014, SAI Global, Sydney, 29 October 2014 (available via eResources).
- Commonwealth Ombudsman. [Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling](#). Canberra, Commonwealth Ombudsman, 2009.
- Commonwealth Ombudsman. [Complaint Management by Government Agencies: an investigation into the management of complaints by Commonwealth and ACT governments](#). Canberra, Commonwealth Ombudsman, October 2014.
- Commonwealth Ombudsman. [Better Practice Guide to Managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct](#), 2012.

Related National Library of Australia documents

- [Service Charter](#) (2018)

- [Privacy Policy 2014 \(PCY 14/004\)](#)
- [Code of Conduct for Readers and Visitors](#)
- [Acceptable Use of Information and Communications Technology](#)