

# Customer complaints policy

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## Introduction

The Medical Practitioners Tribunal service (MPTS) conducts the adjudication function for doctors working in the UK. We protect patients by making independent decisions about a doctor’s fitness to practise, measured against professional standards set by the General Medical Council (GMC). The MPTS hearings service is fully independent in its decision making and separate from the GMC’s investigatory role. We are accountable to Parliament and to the GMC Council in delivering our objectives. We report to Parliament on an annual basis and to the Council of the GMC twice a year.

The MPTS has a [working relationship with the GMC](#), and follows the GMC’s customer complaints policy, processes and systems. This way we can ensure that our customers receive the same quality and consistency of service and that learning from complaints is shared and recorded effectively.

We are committed to providing excellent service in the wide range of interactions we have with our customers, regardless of whether they are engaging with us as a doctor, member of the public, employer or in any other capacity.

Sometimes we get things wrong, or are unable to help our customers in the way they would like. Our customer complaints process gives our customers a voice to provide feedback on our services. Comments and complaints are important to us, they help us understand what works well and give us an opportunity to improve.

This complaints policy supports our core values of:

- Collaboration - we are a listening and learning organisation.
- Excellence - we are committed to excellence in everything that we do.
- Fairness - we treat everyone fairly.

- Transparency - we are honest and strive to be open and transparent.

## What is a customer complaint?

A customer complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction about the services of the GMC or MPTS where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected. Complaints can be made verbally or in writing, and there is no difference between a 'formal' and an 'informal' complaint. You do not need to explicitly state that you are making a complaint for it to be considered as such.

Unless otherwise stated, all references to a complaint in this document refer to customer complaints.

### This policy covers

Complaints relating to any GMC or MPTS team, including:

- a procedure or policy
- the way we have communicated with you
- the actions of our staff\*
- any service we have provided that you feel wasn't satisfactory.

### This policy does not cover

It is important to note that some areas of GMC/MPTS work are not covered by this policy, such as:

- Complaints about doctors - Our fitness to practise processes are separate to our customer complaints process. You can find information on how to complain about a doctor on the [Concerns about doctors](#) section of the GMC website.
- Requests for information under data protection legislation or Freedom of information Act. See the [Accessing information](#) section of the GMC website.
- Challenges to decisions where a right of appeal/legal recourse is available. See the [Comments and complaints](#) section of the GMC Website.

## Our complaints handling principles

We have developed the following principles using lessons learned from our own experience and good practice from other organisations that are recognised for their complaint handling. The principles are consistent with ISO 10002 standards; internationally recognised guidelines for an effective and efficient complaints handling process.

\* Our complaints policy applies to all staff members, agency workers, contractors, associates and anyone else engaged to work with the GMC, whether by direct contract with the organisation or otherwise.

## **Visibility**

Information about how to complain is available on both the [GMC](#) and [MPTS](#) websites. Our staff are informed about the complaints process and able to advise our customers on how to make a complaint. As an organisation we are committed to excellent service and we try to make sure that our complaints process is open and transparent.

## **Accessibility**

We aim to ensure that all our customers are able to make a complaint easily. Information about how to complain is available in a range of formats and you can raise a complaint in a number of ways.

### *Information about how to complain – accessible formats*

Information about how to complain or give feedback about the GMC/MPTS is available in the following formats:

- an accessible version for screen readers
- in Easy Read
- English and Welsh versions

We are also able to provide other formats e.g. large print or Braille, or translations into other languages, if asked.

### *Ways of making a complaint*

We are flexible and want to make sure that everyone has access to our complaints process. Options for contacting us are outlined on the [Comments and complaints](#) section of the GMC Website.

We will make reasonable adjustments for you if you have accessibility needs or a disability, for example, taking complaints over the phone. Please let our staff know if you have any particular needs and we will do our best to make our complaints process accessible.

## **Responsiveness**

We aim to:

- acknowledge receipt of complaints as soon as possible, wherever possible within five working days

- investigate and respond to complaints within ten working days
- let you know any likely delays as soon as we become aware of them. For example, if in the course of reviewing your complaint it becomes clear that it is more complex and requires a longer time to consider.

Where a complaint raises a serious risk or relates to a time-sensitive issue, we will try to prioritise it or escalate to a senior member of staff.

## **Objectivity**

We treat every complaint on its merits, regardless of who has made the complaint.

We act honestly and treat all complainants fairly and with respect.

## **Confidentiality**

We recognise that your personal data is important to you, and we are committed to holding it safely, and using it appropriately.

We maintain complaint records electronically. Where personally identifiable information is recorded it is used for the purpose of investigating and resolving a complaint, or dealing with the wider process in which the complaint was raised. It is stored and processed by the GMC in accordance with data protection legislation.

We report on complaints regularly to understand and improve the performance of our complaints process and of our services. Such reports are not usually published outside of the GMC/MPTS. Personally identifiable information is excluded from all reports that we proactively publish to preserve the confidentiality of those involved.

The information may be used by different teams at the GMC. We may also share your personal data with other parties if required by law, where ordered by a court, or where it is otherwise in the public interest (for example for research purposes). Where possible, data will be anonymised or aggregated before we share it with any other party.

## **Outcomes and responses**

In line with complaints handling best practice, we will try to address all the points raised in your complaint. If we can't we will tell you why.

If we have done something wrong, we will take steps to put it right.

When the outcome you are hoping for isn't achievable, we will explain why and take on board any learning points, for example making our communications clearer.

Sometimes feedback from our customers leads to longer term improvements in our processes, policies or guidance. Where this is the case, we will record the improvement opportunity and pass it to an appropriate colleague to consider taking it forward.

## **Accountability**

Each directorate of the GMC and the MPTS is responsible for handling complaints relating to their area of work and managing the performance of the complaints handling process. Complaints information, trends and improvement work are reported to the Senior Management Team.

The roles and responsibilities of our staff in relation to complaints handling are:

- Customer Complaints Champion – The Chief Operating Officer is the owner of the GMC/MPTS complaints process, responsible for ensuring that customer complaints are handled in accordance with this policy, and maintaining visibility of complaints amongst senior management.
- The Head of the Corporate Review Team - Responsible for reporting complaints from across the GMC and MPTS, responding to escalated complaints, and the maintenance and improvement of the complaints policy & processes.
- Directorate complaints handlers – Responsible for recording and monitoring complaints, investigating and responding to complaints, liaising with local teams to identify learning opportunities and ensure their effective resolution. This includes reporting complaints statistics and learning points to the Corporate Review Team.
- All staff – Responsible for ensuring access to the complaints process, reporting complaints to directorate complaints handlers and providing information for use in customer complaint investigations. All staff should demonstrate that we are responsive to and welcome feedback.

## **Continual improvement**

Complaints can facilitate change, and help teams to design and deliver more effective ways of working and provide excellent service. We encourage all staff to use complaints as a learning opportunity. We work with teams to signpost improvement opportunities and make sure that learning is recorded, acted on and reported at senior level.

All complaints handlers have an ongoing objective to contribute to continuous improvement of the complaints handling process, by making suggestions for improvements and monitoring performance.

We record feedback on the complaints process itself, and where possible, use it to improve the way we handle complaints.

## Customer complaints process

Our step by step process is included in the [Complaints about us](#) section of the MPTS Website.