



# DSS Complaints Management Policy

<b>Policy No:</b>	DSSCorp-085
<b>Purpose:</b>	To ensure Departmental staff are aware of and comply with their obligations under the DSS Complaint Management Process
<b>Category:</b>	<b>Complaints</b>
<b>Applicable to:</b>	All DSS employees including contractors
<b>Relevant Authority:</b>	<i>Ombudsman Act 1976</i> <i>Privacy Act 1988</i>
<b>Related Documents:</b>	<a href="#">DSS Privacy Policy</a> <a href="#">DSS Fraud Control Policy</a> <a href="#">Commonwealth Ombudsman: Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling</a>
<b>Policy Statement:</b>	The department is committed to providing mechanisms for staff and the Australian community to provide feedback or raise concerns about DSS or DSS funded services.
<b>Approved by:</b>	<sup>s22</sup> A/g Branch Manager, Assurance and Performance Branch
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## 1. Introduction

Australian Government agencies providing services directly to the public are required by the Client Service Charter Principles, issued by the Special Minister of State in June 2000, to develop a service charter acknowledging a client's right to complain and containing information about the complaint process.

The [Commonwealth Ombudsman: Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling](#) also provides guidelines for Australian Government agencies to use in managing and handling complaints.

Consistent with the guidelines and the [DSS Client Service Charter](#), the DSS complaints management process provides an accessible process to effectively manage complaints from clients of DSS and DSS funded service providers, in a timely, professional and consistent manner. The complaints management process captures information which assists DSS improve customer service and administrative processes, as well as contribute to policy and program design and implementation.

## 2. Policy

The objective of the DSS complaints management policy is to ensure that complaints received by the department are dealt with in a fair, consistent and timely manner (as detailed in [Section 2.2](#)), and to ensure all departmental staff are aware of their responsibility in relation to complaints handling. Additionally, all staff should be aware of their responsibility to notify the DSS Enterprise Compliance and Feedback Section if they receive a complaint directly.

Effective complaints management offers many practical benefits for the department, including:

- providing a suitable remedy to a complainant;
- maintaining good relations with the public to build their trust;
- capturing information to assist in evaluating and improving programs and services; and
- informing decision making about future service delivery.

### 2.1. Definition of a complaint

The [Australian and New Zealand Standards, AS/NZS 10002:2014](#) guidelines for complaint management in organisations define a complaint as:

*'Expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an organisation, related to its products, services, staff or the handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.'*

For the purposes of this policy, a complaint may relate to:

- unreasonable delay in receiving a service
- inadequate service, explanation of reasons
- legal error
- factual error in decision-making process
- human error
- procedural deficiency
- discriminatory action or decision
- flawed administrative process
- inadequate knowledge/training of staff

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- unprofessional behaviour by an officer
- breach of duty/misconduct by an officer
- breach of non-disclosure directions in relation to Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT).

Complaints in relation to suspected breaches of the APS Code of Conduct, bullying and harassment allegations, or underperformance, need to be directed to the Director, People Relations Section, People Services Branch.

### 2.2. Complaints handling process

Complaints are received by DSS through the complaints phone line, by email, or through the post. Complaints are reviewed by a complaints officer to determine whether the complaint is something that can be responded to by the department. If the matter is something the department can respond to, the complaint will be referred to the relevant policy/program area and/or the Centre of Expertise.

If the complaint relates to alleged fraud, it will be referred to the department's Assurance and Performance Branch to be dealt with in accordance with the department's [Fraud Control Policy](#) and guidelines for [reporting suspected fraud](#).

If a complaint relates to a DSS funded service provider, the complainant will be advised to refer their complaint to the relevant service provider in the first instance. If the complaint cannot be resolved by the service provider, or if the complainant is unhappy with the response, the complaint can be referred back to DSS for review.

As recommended by the Commonwealth Ombudsman, DSS has adopted a standard 28 day timeframe to respond to complaints. Where privacy consent forms are required, the 28 day response timeframe commences once the forms are received from the complainant.

Once a complaint has been addressed by the department, the complainant is provided with contact details for the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office. This is to ensure that the complainant is aware of their right to escalate the matter if they are not satisfied with the way DSS has managed their complaint (for more information see [Section 5: Commonwealth Ombudsman](#)).

### 2.3. Services available to assist with lodging complaints and enquiries

DSS is committed to ensuring all clients have access to its complaints management process. DSS has a number of services available to assist people who are hearing or speech impaired and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Through the National Relay Service, DSS customers who are hearing or speech impaired are encouraged to contact the Department using TTY (teletypewriter); Speak and Listen (speech-to-speech relay) and via internet relay.

DSS customers who require an interpreter may call the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National). Further details regarding these services can be found on the DSS website at the [National Relay Service](#).

### 2.4. DSS Privacy Policy

The [DSS Privacy Policy](#) sets out how DSS complies with the *Privacy Act 1988* (the Privacy Act). To ensure DSS officers are aware of their obligations, they are encouraged to undertake the privacy e-learning module available on the [LearnHub portal](#).

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The Privacy Act regulates how Commonwealth and ACT public sector agencies, and certain private sector organisations, can collect, hold, use and disclose personal information, and how DSS clients can access and correct that information. 'Personal information' is information in any form that can identify a living person.

The Privacy Act applies only to information about individuals, not to information about corporate entities such as businesses, firms or trusts. Detailed information about the Privacy Act can be found on the [Office of the Australian Information Commissioner \('Oaic'\) website](#).

Before the department can action a formal complaint, confirmation must be received that privacy consent has been provided by the complainant.

Occasionally complainants will choose to remain anonymous and not provide privacy consent. In these situations, there are limitations with the type of response the department can provide when addressing the key concerns raised. Further information for dealing with anonymous complainants is included in the detailed guidelines for complaints handling at [DSS Feedback](#).

### 3. Responsibilities

The DSS Enterprise Compliance and Feedback Section has overall responsibility for complaints management in the department, and works closely with line areas to facilitate a timely resolution or response to the complaint.

The Section also has responsibility for capturing information about complaints and providing this information to relevant policy and program areas. If a line area receives a complaint directly, it should be referred to the [DSS Enterprise Compliance and Feedback Section](#).

In accordance with the Ombudsman's Office advice, DSS has adopted a standard 28 day timeframe to respond to complaints. **Line areas are required to provide their cleared responses to complaints within the 28 day timeframe outlined in this policy.** Detailed advice about the complaints handling process can be found in the [Feedback Coordination Guidelines](#).

The level of clearance required for responses to complaints will depend on the nature, complexity and potential impact of the particular complaint. Clearance levels should be determined by relevant branches.

#### 3.1. Other complaints handling mechanisms

Specific complaints handling mechanisms to manage complaints and enquiries arising from particular policy or program initiatives may need to be established. In these cases, business areas should contact the [DSS Enterprise Compliance and Feedback Section](#) to ensure their processes are consistent with this policy and Commonwealth Ombudsman guidelines. The DSS Enterprise Compliance and Feedback Section can assist areas with the design and implementation of complaints handling mechanisms.

It is also important that the DSS Enterprise Compliance and Feedback Section is aware of specific complaints handling mechanisms to ensure there is no delay in referring customers to the correct area in the department to manage their complaint; to refer any Ombudsman's requests that may arise; and to ensure information is captured in a consistent manner.

## 4. Sanctions for non-compliance

If a complainant is not satisfied with the response they have received from the department, or the time taken by the department to provide a response, they are able to lodge a complaint with the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman has broad powers to investigate Commonwealth public administration where complaints have been raised about the administrative actions of Australian Government agencies. The Ombudsman is impartial and independent and is not an advocate for complainants or for agencies (for more information about actions the Ombudsman may take, please see Section 5: Commonwealth Ombudsman below).

## 5. Commonwealth Ombudsman

The Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman is an independent statutory agency established by the *Ombudsman Act 1976* (Ombudsman Act).

Under the Ombudsman Act, the Ombudsman has statutory roles to investigate complaints about the actions and decisions of Australian Government agencies to determine whether they are wrong, unjust, unlawful, discriminatory or just plain unfair. The Ombudsman can also investigate complaints about goods and services delivered by contractors for and on behalf of the Australian Government.

The DSS Enterprise Compliance and Feedback Section is responsible for managing the department's relationship with the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office, and is the nominated point of contact for requests made by the Ombudsman of the department.

There are several steps in the investigation process established by the Ombudsman Act.

Under section 8 (s8), the department must be advised a matter being investigated. This usually occurs within the first contact with the department. In this interaction, the Ombudsman will seek comments and information about the matter being investigated.

Once the Ombudsman is satisfied with the response provided by the department, they will issue a section 12 (s12) notice – no comment or suggestions, and close the investigation.

In some cases, where the Ombudsman is not satisfied with the response provided by the department, they can issue an s12 notice – comment/suggestion. This notice will detail their investigation and will identify anything the Ombudsman considers warrants comment or the making of a suggestion, and offers the department a right of reply. These requests are escalated to senior officers in the department and may require clearance by the relevant Deputy Secretary.

Where the Ombudsman considers there has been a serious case of administrative deficiency, or there is some remedial action the Ombudsman believes the agency should take but has not agreed to, the Ombudsman can make a formal report to the Secretary under section 15 of the Ombudsman Act.

Detailed information about the functions and powers of the Commonwealth Ombudsman can be found at [www.ombudsman.gov.au/](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/).

## 6. Reporting and monitoring of complaints information

The DSS Enterprise Compliance and Feedback Section has responsibility for monitoring progress of responses to all complaints and Ombudsman requests.

The Section also has responsibility for reporting on complaint and Ombudsman activity. This includes:

- providing regular statistical updates to senior executives;
- providing reporting as feedback to line areas;
- reporting statistical information to the Annual Report; and
- reporting on Ombudsman publications concerning DSS to the Audit and Assurance Committee.

DSS complaints reporting processes are consistent with recommendations set out in the [Commonwealth Ombudsman: Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling](#).

## 7. More information, advice and support

For questions regarding complaints or matters concerning the Commonwealth Ombudsman, please contact the DSS Enterprise Compliance and Feedback Section, Performance and Assurance Branch, on 1800 634 035 or email [complaints@dss.gov.au](mailto:complaints@dss.gov.au).

Further information and detailed guidelines about the complaints handling process can be found on the [DSS Feedback and Complaints webpage](#).

This policy will be reviewed annually and updated as required.



# DSS Feedback Coordination Guidelines

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Instructions for DSS Feedback Coordination Team (FCT)

These instructions have been designed to assist you in your role in managing enquiries and complaints directed to the Department. The following are the steps you will need to follow for each of the streams of the FCT.

*Please ensure that you adhere to privacy principles throughout both processes.*

#### Enquiries

You have received an approach via email through the [DSSfeedback@DSS.gov.au](mailto:DSSfeedback@DSS.gov.au) mailbox from a correspondent asking for information; resources or providing the Department with information. Once you have read the email, you will need to make a decision about whether it is something that this Department can deal with, if it needs to be referred to a different department, or if the email is considered SPAM (junk mail).

#### If the matter is something that this Department can deal with:

1. You will need to ascertain if a response is required or if it can be simply forwarded for information only.
2. Once this has been determined, you then need to refer to the Enquiries Contacts List (saved in FIRSt under "Complaints Management (Restricted)/Enquiries/AAA- Coordinators/Current Coordinator Update Lists") to determine who is the appropriate coordinator in the relevant area of the Department. If you find it difficult to determine the appropriate coordinator, it might be appropriate to call an area who you feel may be responsible for the approach for advice. Once you have determined your coordinator you will then need to forward the email to them along with instructions about response requirements, due dates or information only etc. Templates for these emails can be found at **Attachment A**.
3. Once the enquiry is allocated, a new record in the Feedback Management System (FMS), Enquiries list needs to be created including all of the details of the correspondent and the approach. When adding a note please ensure you add the date and your initials at the beginning of the note eg. 01/01/2013 AW.
4. Whilst entering the enquiry onto the FMS you also need to indicate who you allocated the enquiry to and what category it falls into. For example; the Department may receive an email asking for information about Housing Assistance. On FMS, you would record the category as "Response Required" the Subject Area would be "Housing" and in the drop down field you would select the appropriate Group/Branch the enquiry was sent to.
5. Once the enquiry has been placed on the FMS, you then need to create a folder in the Enquiries Workspace in FIRSt.

6. You need to ensure that the folder is created using the name of the correspondent making the enquiry, followed by the number that was allocated to that enquiry by the FMS for example; Smith, John (1123).
7. Whilst creating the folder you need to ensure that you check the Permissions TAB and "untick" the box that indicates inherit permissions.
8. **Security Permissions for all folders should only include "Administrator"; "WS2009/5345" and "Restricted" to ensure all staff in the Section have access. The WS2009/5345 group requires "Full Access". The other group requires "Read/Write" access.**
9. Once the folder has been created, ensure that ALL correspondence in relation to this enquiry is stored in that folder.
10. Once notification is received from the coordinator advising that the enquiry has been dealt with, you need to go back into the Feedback Management system and update the enquiry record. This means ensuring that the notes accurately reflect what has occurred and then close the matter on the system, ensuring you include the date the enquiry was closed. You also need to ensure we have a copy of the response in the folder.
11. Once the enquiry is closed on the system, you then go back into the enquiries workspace and move the folder from the enquiries folder into the "ZArchive" folder under the relevant letter of the alphabet.

**If the matter needs to be referred elsewhere:**

12. If the enquiry is not for this Department and needs to be referred elsewhere, then you will need to send a letter to the correspondent explaining where their enquiry should be directed. Examples of these letters can be found at **Attachment B**.
13. You also need to enter the enquiry on to the FMS and indicate which category the email falls into **for example; "Wrong Department"**.
14. Once the enquiry has been placed on the FMS, you then need to create a folder in the Enquiries Workspace in FIRSt.
15. The folder will need to be titled using the name of the correspondent making the enquiry, followed by the number that was allocated to that enquiry by the FMS for example; Smith, John (1123).
16. Whilst creating the folder you need to ensure that you check the Permissions TAB and "untick" the box that indicates inherit permissions. **Security Permissions for all folders should only include "Administrator"; "WS2009/5345" and "Restricted" to ensure all staff in the Section have access. The WS2009/5345 group requires "Full Access". The other group requires "Read/Write" access.**
17. Once the folder has been established with the correct title and permissions ensure that ALL correspondence in relation to this enquiry is stored in that folder.
18. You can then close the matter on the FMS, ensuring that you include the date.

19. Once the enquiry is closed on the system, you can then go back into the enquiries workspace and move the folder from the enquiries folder into the "ZArchive" folder under the relevant letter of the alphabet.

### **If the enquiry is SPAM:**

20. SPAM enquiries also need to be entered and recorded on the FMS for reporting purposes.
21. You will need to indicate that the category for the enquiry is "SPAM".
22. When you create the Title on the FMS – you need to start with the word "SPAM" and then state what it is about. For example; "SPAM – Viagra Tablets for Sale".
23. Once entered on the FMS, you can immediately close the enquiry, including the date
24. The email can then be dragged into the folder under the Inbox which is named the current year and Spam for example; 2013 "SPAM".

### **Complaints**

You have received an approach via phone call on the Complaints Hotline (1800 634 035) or an email from the [complaints@DSS.gov.au](mailto:complaints@DSS.gov.au) mailbox, or a letter from someone wishing to make a complaint. Based on the details provided to you by the complainant; you will need to make a decision about whether it is something that this Department can deal with, if it needs to be referred to a different department or if it needs to be referred back to the grant recipient in the first instance before this Department deals with it.

If you receive a complaint about a DSS staff member you must transfer the call to the EL1 team leader or bring the email/letter to their attention to progress. If the EL1 is not available then transfer or advise the EL2 section manager.

If the person requires an Interpreter then you will need to obtain their name, phone number and advice about their preferred language and advise you will call them back. There is a Fact Sheet about how to use the Translating and Interpreter Service (TIS).

### **If it is something that this Department can deal with:**

1. You need to take down all the details of the complaint and begin identifying the key concerns the complainant is raising. You also need to ensure you speak to the complainant about their desired outcomes.
2. If you are on the phone with the complainant, you need to ensure they understand that the process for complaints within this department takes 28 days, that we need their privacy consent and that we will need to make sure that the key concerns

agreed to during the telephone conversation are in fact things that the Department can look into.

3. You will need to obtain all appropriate contact details for the complainant and explain to the person on the phone that you will either phone them back or you will send them a letter which outlines the key concerns and requesting their privacy consent.
4. The next step is to place the details for the complaint into the Complaint Recording Template (**Attachment C**). This records the details of the complaint and the circumstances and dates of any events that took place which substantiate the complaint. It also contains the key concerns and the desired outcomes which need to be sent to the Program area/State Office using the pre-approved email/letter template and then to the complainant for clearance. It is important to note in the Complaint Recording template any conversation that was held around the desired outcomes so the Action Officer and Coordinator can tell what has been advised in relation to the desired outcomes.
5. Once the Program area/State Office has agreed to the key concerns you need to send a letter (**Attachment D**) to the complainant outlining their key concerns and request their privacy consent.
6. The letter requests the privacy consent form be signed and returned to the Complaints Team in order for the matter to be allocated to the appropriate area for action. The letter also advises the complainant that on receipt of the signed consent form, they may be contacted by another DSS staff member seeking additional information. Alternatively, complainants may choose to remain anonymous; however, without consent it will be difficult for the Department to comprehensively address the concerns. The privacy consent form seeks permission for DSS to disclose personal information to the third party grant recipient and for the third party grant recipient to provide DSS with the **complainant's** private information.
7. You will then need to create a new record in the Feedback Management System (FMS), Complaints Tracking list and enter all the details. Ensure the Status is marked as "**Received**". When adding a note please ensure you add the date and your initials at the beginning of the note eg. 01/01/2013 - AW.
8. As you enter the complaint onto the FMS you will need to assign it to a coordinator and ensure you enter what category the complaint falls into.
9. Once the complaint has been recorded on the FMS, you then need to create a folder in the Complaints Workspace in FIRSt under the appropriate State (the State is recorded based on where the complaint is being dealt with).
10. You need to ensure that the folder is created using the number that was allocated to that complaint by the FMS. Whilst creating the folder you need to ensure that you check the Permissions TAB and give specific permissions to those who will be

involved in dealing with the complaint (Coordinators and Action Officers) as well as the members of the FCT. The WS2009/5345 group requires "Full Access". All other groups require "Read/Write" access.

11. .
12. You will need to save a copy of the following forms into the folder. Grant Recipient Standard Response Template (**Attachment L**), Complaints Process Report template (**Attachment N**) and Final Response template (**Attachment H**).
13. If you have not received agreement to the key concerns and privacy consent within one month of taking the original complaint; you will need to send the complainant a Possible Closure of Complaint Letter (**Attachment E**) advising them that the Department cannot proceed with their complaint until consent is received and requesting that they contact the Department and send through information of their consent within two weeks in order to proceed with the complaint.
14. Once you have received consent for the key concerns and privacy consent or advice to remain anonymous, the complaint needs to be allocated to the relevant Complaints Coordinator. This means a notification email will need to be sent to the Complaints Coordinator through FMS as well as the FMS record updated to reflect the complaint has been reassigned. Once this has occurred on the FMS the status should be updated to "In Progress".
15. Before sending your Complaints Coordinator an Allocation Email, it is important to ensure that the Consent Status Date is listed within the Complaints Record on FMS. This date is the date that FCT are made aware of the Consent Status. This could be the date FCT are provided with Consent; the date in which the complainant advises FCT they wish to remain anonymous or the date the complaint is progressed on the basis that consent is not required. The completion of this field will in turn, generate the 21 day timeframe in which the response is provided to FCT. To send a Complaints Coordinator an email notification of a complaint allocation; the Complaints officer must go into the Feedback Management system; open the Active Complaints list and tick the complaint to be emailed (only one allocation email can be sent at one time).
16. The notification email (detailed instructions at **Attachment F**) will be sent from the FMS advising the Coordinator they have access to the FIRSt folder, and have a copy of the Coordinator guidelines and the Action Officer Guidelines attached.
17. Once a complaint is allocated, the Department has a timeframe of 28 days to look into the concerns raised and to respond to the complainant. The response from the Complaints Coordinator is due back to the FCT in 21 days. If you do not receive a response from the relevant area within that timeframe, it is imperative that you follow up on the status of the response with the Coordinator and, if necessary, send a delay letter (**Attachment G**) to the complainant **prior** to the 28 day period ending.

18. If the Complaint Coordinator feels they will be unable to finalise the response within the allocated timeframe they should formally request an extension and provide a reason for the extension and a new due date. The Complaints officer can either agree or disagree with the extension and the new due date. The complaints officer will need to record the extension request and reason on the FMS and enter the new due date.
19. Once a final response has been SES cleared and sent to the FCT, the letter (**Attachment H**) needs to be sent to the complainant and the complaint record needs to be updated in the FMS. The status needs to be changed to "closed" and the close date inserted.
20. All correspondence relating to that complaint needs to be filed in the FIRSt folder. If you still have not received a response from the complainant two weeks after the Possible Closure of Complaint Letter (**Attachment E**) was sent, you will need to close the complaint on FMS and archive the file in FIRSt. Please note when archiving a folder it should be archived in the year it was open and not in the year it was closed.

### **Referred to a Different Department or Back to Organisation**

21. If the complaint is not something that this Department can look into, or if the complainant should go back to the organisation in the first instance, then the complaint will still need to be entered onto the FMS and a response sent to the complainant. The response should provide details of where the complainant could take their concerns (**Attachment B**) or refer them back to the organisation in the first instance (**Attachment I**).
22. You need to ensure that details of the complaint and the organisation you have referred the complainant to are accurately recorded in the FMS. With the correct category selected "Wrong Department" or "Referred back to Organisation"
23. You also need to ensure that you close the complaint on the FMS and include the date of closure.
24. If the complaint was received by email, you will need to create a FIRSt folder under the appropriate State (the State is recorded based on where the complaint was dealt with in both these cases – National Office) and ensure that all the documentation is stored in the FIRSt folder.
25. You need to ensure that the folder is created using the number that was allocated to that complaint by the FMS.
26. Once the complaint/approach is closed on the system and FMS is updated to reflect its closure, you can then go back into the workspace and move the folder from the Complaints folder into the "Archive" folder under the relevant state and year.

Please Note: FCT staff who are responsible for answering the complaints line are required to provide their first name only to complainants. FCT staff do not provide their surname due to privacy requirements. When communicating with complainants FCT staff use a generic email address and provide the 1800 complaints number as a contact number and should not provide their direct email address or phone number.

### **Staff Complaints**

Any complaints about a DSS staff member need to be passed on to the EL1 in the Feedback Coordination Team. If the EL1 is not available, then it should be escalated to the EL2.

Once with the EL1, they will send the information to the coordinator in People Branch to seek advice about whether the matter should be dealt with under the Code of Conduct procedure, or if the matter can be dealt with under the complaints management process.

If People Branch advice the matter should be dealt with as part of the normal Code of Conduct process, the matter is closed on the system and the information filed.

If the matter is to be dealt with through the normal complaints management process, an email is sent to the Manager once removed of the person the complaint is about. (For example, if the complaint relates to an AP6 staff member, the EL2 Director of the staff member is contacted).

It is up to the Manager once removed to determine how best to deal with the complaint, whether the person complained about should be notified and what action should be taken in relation to the staff member involved. The Manager once removed will be asked to provide information to the Feedback Coordination Team EL1 (EL2 if they forwarded the complaint) once the matter is resolved.

The complainant will be advised that whilst the Department takes complaints of this nature very seriously and the matter will be dealt with appropriately, however, due to Privacy provisions, the complainant will not be advised of the outcome of the complaint, but will be notified once the matter has been completed.

## Attachment A

### Allocation of Enquiry

Good Afternoon,

The DSS Feedback Coordination Team received an enquiry this afternoon in relation to the (INSERT DETAIL).

Can you please advise ASAP whether you are able to provide a response to this enquiry? Normal turnaround time for the enquiry process is 2 weeks although a response sooner rather than later is obviously desirable.

I would be happy to forward any response from the [DSSfeedback@DSS.gov.au](mailto:DSSfeedback@DSS.gov.au) mailbox. Alternatively, you could send it straight from your branch with a cc to the aforementioned mailbox.

### Name

DSS Feedback Coordination Team

Email: [DSSfeedback@DSS.gov.au](mailto:DSSfeedback@DSS.gov.au)

Post: DSS Feedback, PO Box 7576, Canberra Business Centre, ACT 2610

### For Information Only

Good Afternoon,

The following email was received in the Feedback mailbox. It is forwarded to you for information only.

Please forward it on if and where you think appropriate.

### Name

DSS Feedback Coordination Team

Email: [DSSfeedback@DSS.gov.au](mailto:DSSfeedback@DSS.gov.au)

Post: DSS Feedback, PO Box 7576, Canberra Business Centre, ACT 2610

## Attachment B

### Referred elsewhere

#### Example A – Centrelink

Good Morning,

Thank you for your email of (INSERT DATE), in regards to your Centrelink payments.

Unfortunately your concerns are not something that DSS can look into. As the matter relates to Centrelink, you should direct your enquiries to the Department of Human Services.

For your information, the contact details for that Department are:

Department of Human Services

Website: <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/>

Alternatively you could go to the Centrelink contact page at [http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/contact\\_us/index.htm](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/contact_us/index.htm) to send a secure online message.

I hope this information is of some assistance to you.

#### Name

DSS Feedback Coordination Team

Email: [DSSfeedback@DSS.gov.au](mailto:DSSfeedback@DSS.gov.au)

Post: DSS Feedback, PO Box 7576, Canberra Business Centre, ACT 2610

#### Example B – Department of Education

Good Morning,

Thank you for your email of (INSERT DATE) in regards to Child Care benefit and tax rebate.

Unfortunately this is not an area that DSS can look into. As the matter relates to child care, you should direct your enquiry to the Department of Education.

For your information, the contact details of that Department are:

Department of Education

Website: <http://www.education.gov.au>

Telephone: 13 33 97

I hope this information is of some assistance to you.

#### Name

DSS Feedback Coordination Team

Email: [DSSfeedback@DSS.gov.au](mailto:DSSfeedback@DSS.gov.au)

Post: DSS Feedback, PO Box 7576, Canberra Business Centre, ACT 2610

**Attachment C**

**COMPLAINT RECORDING TEMPLATE**

Complaint Information (to be completed by the DSS complaints officer)	
Complaint Recording System ID:	
Date of Complaint:	
Name of Complainant:	
Contact Details of Complainant:	
Name of Grant Recipient (if applicable):	
Details of Complaint:	
<p>Key issues to be addressed in our response:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ol>	
<p>The FCT recommend the following course of action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>	
<p>The complainant has agreed to the above key concerns:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes      <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>Desired outcome of the complainant (if appropriate):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ol>	
<p>Is this complaint anonymous:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes      <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>Has the complainant's privacy consent been given:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes      <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	

**Attachment D**

Name  
Email/Address

Dear

Thank you for your letter/email/call of DATE where you raised concerns about...

I have identified the following key concerns from your email/conversation which the Department will look into:

1.

If you believe that I have not accurately reflected your concerns, please contact me on the number below as soon as possible.

***OPTIONAL – if there are also concerns that are not in scope:***

Unfortunately, your concerns about XXX are not something that the Department can look into. As the matter relates to XXX, you should direct your concerns to (INSERT NAME OF ORG). **For your information, the contact details of that organisation are .....**

I have attached a privacy consent form and I ask that you please sign and return the form using the contact details below. Alternatively, you may choose to remain anonymous; however it is important to note that without your consent it will be difficult for the Department to comprehensively address your concerns.

Once we receive either the privacy consent form or advice that you wish to remain anonymous, the matter will be allocated to the appropriate area for action. As such, you should be aware that you may be contacted by another DSS staff member seeking additional information.

We will endeavour to provide a final written response to your concerns within 28 days of receiving your signed consent form. We will treat all information about you/your organisation confidentially in accordance with the Commonwealth policy provisions and laws.

If you wish to discuss the progress of this matter, please feel free to contact me on the details listed below.

Yours Sincerely,

**Name**

DSS Feedback Coordination Team

Ph: 1800 634 035

Fax: (02) 6133 8442

Email: [complaints@DSS.gov.au](mailto:complaints@DSS.gov.au)

Post: DSS Complaints, PO Box 7576, Canberra Business Centre, ACT 2610

DATE

Our Reference:

**Attachment E**

**Possible Closure of Complaint Letter**

Name  
Email/Address

Dear

Thank you for your phone call/letter on DATE in which you raised concerns about XXXX.

In our last correspondence to you on DATE, we sent you a letter identifying the key concern/s that the Department is able to look into and a privacy consent form.

As we have not had any contact from you since this date, I am writing to advise you that if we do not hear anything from you by Close of Business DATE, we will close it on our records. Please note we are able to reopen the complaint at a later stage if and when you are able to provide us with your signed consent form and agreement on the key concern.

If you would prefer to discuss this matter over the phone, please feel free to contact me on the number below.

Yours Sincerely,

**Name**

DSS Feedback Coordination Team

Ph: 1800 634 035

Fax: (02) 6133 8442

Email: [complaints@DSS.gov.au](mailto:complaints@DSS.gov.au)

Post: DSS Complaints, PO Box 7576, Canberra Business Centre, ACT 2610

Date:

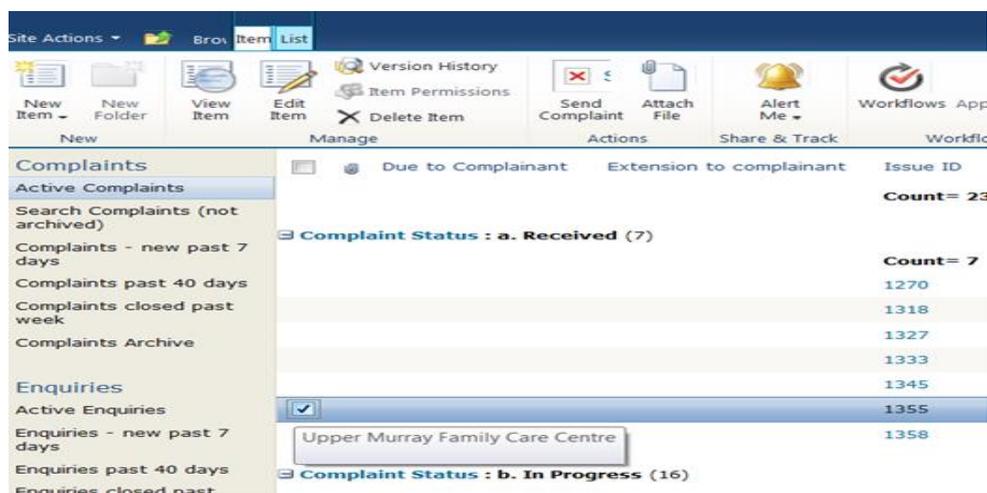
Our Reference:

**Attachment F**

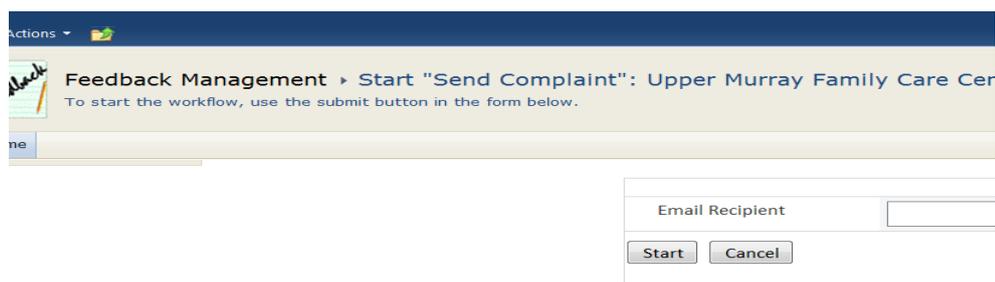
**Allocation Email – complaint**

Before sending your Complaints Coordinator an Allocation Email, it is important to ensure that the Consent Status Date is listed within the Complaints Record. This date is the date that FCT are made aware of the Consent Status. This could be the date FCT are provided with Consent; the date in which the complainant advises FCT that they wish to remain anonymous or the date in which the complaint is progressed on the basis that consent is not required. The completion of this field will in turn, generate the 21 day timeframe in which the response is provided to FCT.

To send a Complaints Coordinator an email notification of a complaint allocation; the Complaints officer must go into the Feedback Management system; open the Active Complaints list and tick the complaint to be emailed (only one allocation email can be sent at one time).



From the List Tools/Items Tab click the **"Send Complaint"** icon:  and specify the email recipient/Complaint Coordinator in which you intend to allocate the complaint to.



Once you have listed the recipient, click "Start".

The email is sent to the recipients and Complaints mailbox is CC'd.

**Attachment G**

**Delay Letter**

Name  
Email/Address

Dear

I am writing with regard to the matter you raised with the Department of Social Services (DSS) Complaints Team on (INSERT DATE).

Unfortunately the Department has not been able to complete looking into your concerns. I can assure you that the matter is being seriously considered and we will have a response to you as soon as possible.

Yours Sincerely,

**Name**

DSS Feedback Coordination Team

Ph: 1800 634 035

Fax: (02) 6133 8442

Email: [complaints@DSS.gov.au](mailto:complaints@DSS.gov.au)

Post: DSS Complaints, PO Box 7576, Canberra Business Centre, ACT 2610

DATE

Our Reference:

## Attachment H

### Final Response Template

Name  
Email/Address

Dear

I am writing in response to the concerns you raised with the Department of Social Services (the Department) on (INSERT DATE) about the service you received at (INSERT NAME OF ORG).

The Department has raised the matters you identified with (ORG) who manage this service. **The Department's role is to look into your concerns and the responses provided by (ORG)** to determine if the terms and conditions of their grant agreement with the Department have been met.

#### *OPTIONAL*

*The Department's investigation found that in response to your complaints, (ORG) has taken steps to ensure that its protocols are strengthened and that staff are fully aware of their obligations under these protocols so that this should not happen to others in future.*

#### *OPTIONAL*

*Due to the uniqueness and complexity of individual case management, DSS does not have the expertise or authority to question the professional judgement of practitioners, or to express a view about the result of a delivered service.*

Please find the following detailed response to each of your concerns identified in your correspondence with the Department.

#### **1. WRITE OUT THE FIRST KEY CONCERN**

Explain here what the (ORG) said and what we determined based on this to explain the finding.

The Department finds that (make a finding here – some examples are listed below).

#### **2. WRITE OUT THE SECOND KEY CONCERN**

Explain here what the (ORG) said and what we determined based on this to explain the finding.

The Department finds that (make a finding here – some examples are listed below).

#### EXAMPLES OF FINDINGS:

- The information provided to the Department on this matter is inconsistent. Therefore; the Department is unable to reach a conclusion in relation to this matter and no further action will be taken.
- The Department considers that the explanation provided by the (ORG) is appropriate and no further action will be taken.

- The Department considers that the (ORG) could have done more to ensure that you were (INSERT ISSUE). However, we are satisfied that the changes proposed by the (ORG) will ensure that this problem does not happen again in the future.

Thank you for bringing these matters to the attention of the Department. All feedback helps us to ensure that our providers deliver high quality services to the community.

I hope you **are satisfied with the Department's handling of your complaint. If you are not,** you are able to take this matter to the Commonwealth Ombudsman who can be contacted on 1300 362 072.

**Name**

DSS Feedback Coordination Team

Ph: 1800 634 035

Fax: (02) 6133 8442

Email: [complaints@DSS.gov.au](mailto:complaints@DSS.gov.au)

Post: DSS Complaints, PO Box 7576, Canberra Business Centre, ACT 2610

DATE

Our Reference:

## Attachment I

### Referred back to organisation

Name  
Email/Address

Dear

Thank you for your email/letter/call of INSERT DATE where you raised concerns about XXXX

Having considered your concerns I believe that it may be best for you to attempt to resolve them with (INSERT NAME OF ORG) in the first instance. This approach is often more effective as it takes less time and allows the grant recipient to register the direct feedback.

In this instance, you would need to (INSERT PROCESS) to lodge a complaint. For your information, details of that organisation are as follows:

I would ask that you please attempt the above course of action before progressing the complaint with DSS. However, should you attempt this and find that you are still not satisfied you can call me on the contact details below to progress your complaint.

#### **Name**

DSS Feedback Coordination Team

Ph: 1800 634 035

Fax: (02) 6133 8442

Email: [complaints@DSS.gov.au](mailto:complaints@DSS.gov.au)

Post: DSS Complaints, PO Box 7576, Canberra Business Centre, ACT 2610

DATE

Our Reference



## Fact Sheet

### DSS Feedback Overview

The Department encourages all clients to provide feedback on their experiences with DSS or DSS funded grant recipients so that we can continue to improve the services we offer to the Australian community. Any feedback received through this channel will be provided to the relevant DSS area for appropriate action.

The DSS Feedback Coordination Team (FCT) manages **all** Complaints, Compliments and Enquiries received by the Department. If Departmental staff receive a call about a complaint – they should transfer the call to the FCT or provide the FCT with contact details for the complainant.

#### **Complaints**

The DSS Complaints Officer manages the DSS complaints hotline, complaints mailbox and any hard copy complaints sent to the Department. The Complaints Officer will identify the key concerns that the complainant would like the Department to look into, identify the responsible area and record the complaint on the Feedback Management System (FMS). The Complaints Officer works with Coordinators and Action Officers throughout the department to ensure a satisfactory response is sent to the complainant.

#### **Enquiries and Compliments**

The DSS Enquiries Officer manages the DSS Feedback mailbox. All enquiries sent to this mailbox are recorded in the FMS. The Enquiries Officer works with Enquiries Coordinators throughout the Department to ensure a suitable response is sent out to the correspondent.

#### **Ombudsman's Complaints**

If a complainant is unsatisfied with the way that DSS has dealt with their complaint they can escalate their concerns to the Commonwealth Ombudsman. The FCT works with Coordinators and Actions Officers to respond to these issues. The Commonwealth Ombudsman also looks at DSS funded services and initiatives in relation to Indigenous Issues and responses to these issues are also coordinated by the FCT.

DSS has formal processes in place for handling enquiries and complaints. Guidelines have been developed to assist all staff involved in these processes. There are instructions for;

- Instructions for DSS Feedback Coordination Team (FCT)
- Instructions for Complaints Coordinators
- Instructions for Complaints Action Officers
- **Dealing with the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office**
- Dealing with Unreasonable Complainant Conduct



## Fact Sheet

### Instructions for FCT Complaints Officer

Detailed instructions can be found in the guide Instructions for DSS Feedback Coordination Team (FCT). Please refer to this guide before actioning any Complaints received.

You have received a complaint through either the [complaints@DSS.gov.au](mailto:complaints@DSS.gov.au) mailbox or through the post from a complainant wishing to make a complaint about DSS or a DSS funded grant recipient.

You will need to make a decision as to whether it is something the Department can deal with, whether the complainant needs to be referred to a different Department or whether the complainant needs to be referred back to the organisation in the first instance.

If the complainant has not complained to the organisation or the auspicing body of the organisation then we would recommend that they go through this process in the first instance. This approach can often be more effective as it takes less time and allows the organisation to register the direct feedback it receives.

If the complaint is something the Department can deal with you will need to do the following:

- Identify and agree on the key concerns and obtain privacy consent from the complainant
- Log the complaint on the Feedback Management System (FMS) which will then generate a number.
- Create a folder in FIRSt for the complaint using the number generated by the FMS under the state/territory that will be dealing with the complaint.
- Through the FMS; allocate the complaint to the appropriate Complaints Coordinator.
- Ensure you update the FMS to reflect who the complaint has been assigned to.
- Track progress of the complaint ensuring that a response is received back to the FCT within 21 days.
- Undertake a quality assurance check on final responses, then post/email the response to the complainant, close the complaint on FMS and archive it into FIRSt.

If the complaint is not something that the Department can look into, it will still need to be logged on the FMS. A reply should also be sent to the complainant to advise them that unfortunately, the Department is unable to help. Where appropriate, you need to provide advice to the complainant on who may be able to help with their issue/s such as an alternative Department or organisation and contact details are then supplied in the response.



## Fact Sheet

### Instructions for Enquiries Officer

Detailed instructions can be found in the guide Instructions for DSS Feedback Coordination Team (FCT). Please refer to this guide before actioning any Enquiries received. You have received an email through the [DSSfeedback@DSS.gov.au](mailto:DSSfeedback@DSS.gov.au) mailbox from a correspondent asking for information or resources or simply providing us with information.

You will need to make a decision as to whether it is something the Department can deal with, whether the correspondent needs to be referred to a different Department or whether it is SPAM (junk mail).

If the enquiry is something the Department can deal with you will need to do the following:

- Log the enquiry on the SharePoint Feedback Management System (SharePoint) which will then generate a number.
- Create a folder on FIRSt for the enquiry listing SURNAME, CHRISTIAN NAME (ENQUIRY NUMBER) under the main enquiries folder.
- Allocate the enquiry to the appropriate area of the Department using the Enquiries Coordinator list. Enquiry may be for action, for information only or as a request for a resource.
- Track progress of enquiry within the Department sending a reminder out after 2 weeks if necessary, and a delay letter to the enquirer if required.
- Undertake a quality assurance check on final responses, then post/email them out and close off the enquiry on SharePoint and archive it into FIRSt.

If the enquiry is not something that the Department can assist with it will still need to be logged on SharePoint and a folder created as set out above. A reply should be sent to the correspondent to advise them that unfortunately, the Department is unable to help. Where appropriate, the FCT try to provide advice to the correspondent on who may be able to help with their issue/s such as an alternative department or organisation. Contact details are then supplied in the response email.

If the enquiry is SPAM, the email will still need to be logged on FMS but will be filed in the SPAM folder for that year without action.

Emails that do not require a response, but are considered informative for the Department, **should be sent out as 'Information Only'**. These emails need to be logged in FMS and filed in the 'Information Only' file in FIRSt.



## DSS Complaints Coordination Team

### What is a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, either written or verbal, made by or on behalf of a service user. It can also be a description of a problem, and all the procedures followed in order to resolve that problem, before reaching the point where you no longer know how to proceed.

The DSS Feedback Management System manages complaints about DSS service(s), or the service of a DSS funded Grant Recipient. These complaints can relate to:

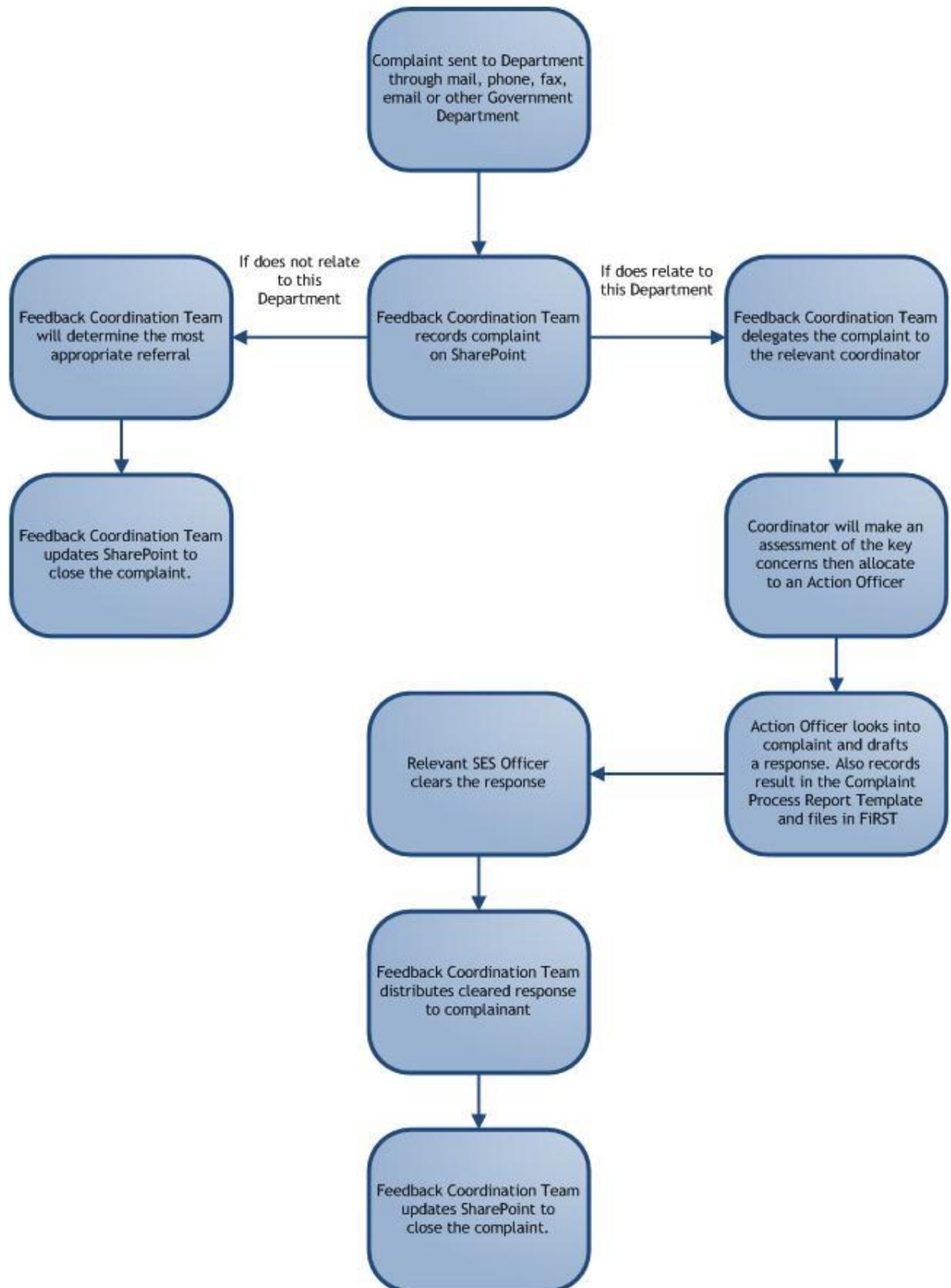
- Unreasonable delay in receiving a service
- Inadequate service, explanation or reasons
- Legal error
- Factual error in decision making process
- Human error
- Procedural deficiency
- Discriminatory action or decision
- Flawed administrative process
- Inadequate knowledge/training of staff
- Unprofessional behaviour by an officer
- Breach of duty/misconduct by an officer
- Breach of Non-disclosure directions in relation to Social Security Appeals Tribunal (SSAT)

Any issues which relate to the list below will NOT be dealt with as a complaint:

- Government policy
- Legislation
- Reviews over eligibility for a benefit or entitlement. (These concerns should be addressed to the relevant decision making body).

These will be registered on the DSS Feedback Management System as approaches to the Department and will be categorised accordingly.

# COMPLAINTS COORDINATION MODEL



## CHAPTER TWO

### Instructions for Complaints Coordinators

These instructions have been provided to you to assist you in looking into a **complaint**. The following are the steps you will need to follow.

*Please ensure that you adhere to privacy principles throughout this process.*

1. You have received an email from the DSS Feedback Coordination Team (FCT) advising that a complaint has been received and that you have been identified as the appropriate coordinator. You have been requested to review/clear the complaint recording template and key concerns identified to ensure the key concern are something that the department (your area) can look into under the funding agreement.
2. If you agree or have feedback with the key concerns please reply to the complaints officer with this advice so that they can send a letter to the complainant seeking their approval and privacy consent. Please note that at this stage you are only clearing the key concerns and no further action is required until the complaint is officially allocated to you.
3. If you require access to the FIRSt folder prior to the complaint being officially allocated to you to save relevant correspondence please contact the complaints officer to request.
4. Once the FCT has received agreement to the key concerns and privacy consent from the complainant the matter will be officially allocated to you for action. The notification email (detailed instructions at Attachment F) will be sent from the FMS advising you have access to the FIRSt folder, and a copy of the Coordinator guidelines and the Action Officer Guidelines attached.
5. The FCT has provided you with access to the FIRSt folder relating to this case. **(Attachment J)** contains instructions on accessing the FIRSt workspace. The complaint recording template is contained in **(Attachment C)** along with forms needed to complete the complaint, Grant Recipient Standard Response template **(Attachment L)**, Complaint Process Report template **(Attachment N)** and Final Response template **(Attachment H)**. You will need to view the template **(Attachment C)** and ensure that you are aware of the key concern(s) and desired outcome(s) of the complainant.

6. s47E



s47E

7.

8

9.

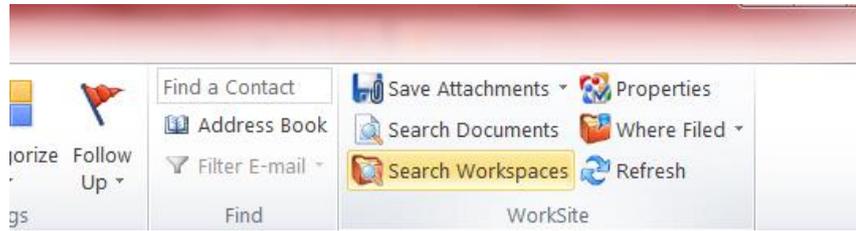
10. Once you are satisfied that the complaint has been adequately looked into, and **that you have an agreed view on each of the complainant's identified concerns**, the Action Officer can draft the response using the final response template (**Attachment H**) and complete the complaint process report template (**Attachment N**). You should review the draft and the template to ensure that all the concerns are included in the response and any desired outcomes of the complainant are addressed. If changes are needed, work with the Action Officer to make these.
11. Once you are comfortable with the report and draft response, you or the Action Officer should arrange to send the response to the FCT to look over it. The FCT will recommend any changes to formatting or content and get back to you.
12. Once the FCT is satisfied that the letter meets the normal standards, you or the Action Officer should arrange clearance with your SES or relevant clearing officer.
13. Once cleared and updated, you will need to send the response to the FCT. The FCT is responsible for sending the complaint response – please **DO NOT** send the response directly from your area.
14. You also need to ensure that all documents are filed in the relevant FIRST folder.

Note: If at any time you feel that the response is not going to be finalised within the agreed period you can request an extension from the Complaints officer. To do this you should formally email the request and provide a reason for why the extension is required.

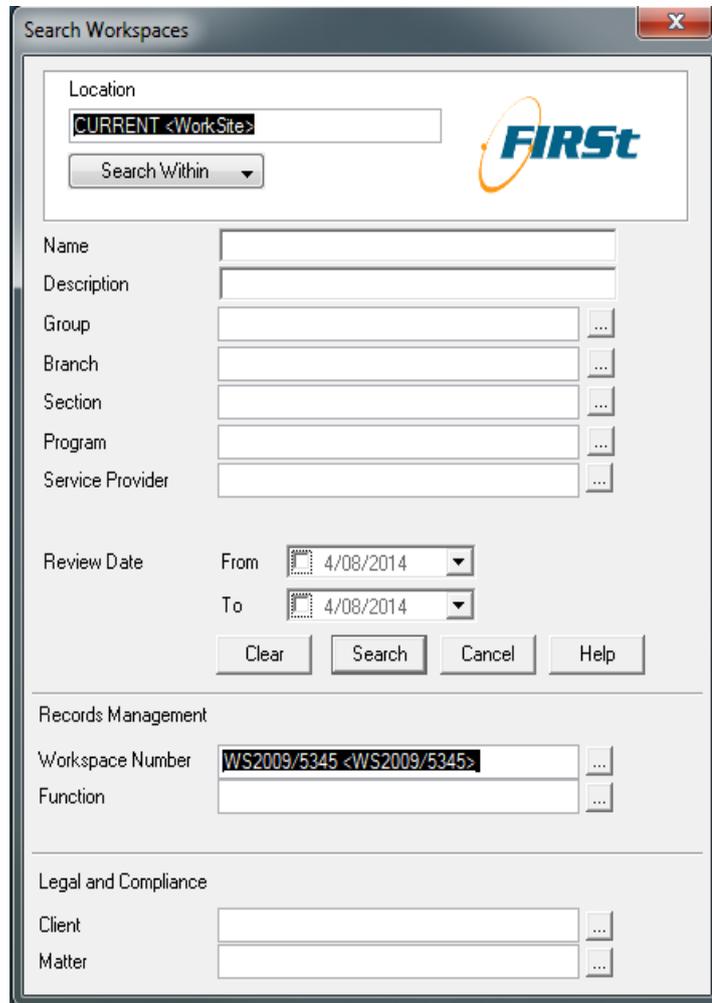
**Attachment J**

**Adding the Complaints Management Workspace in FIRSt**

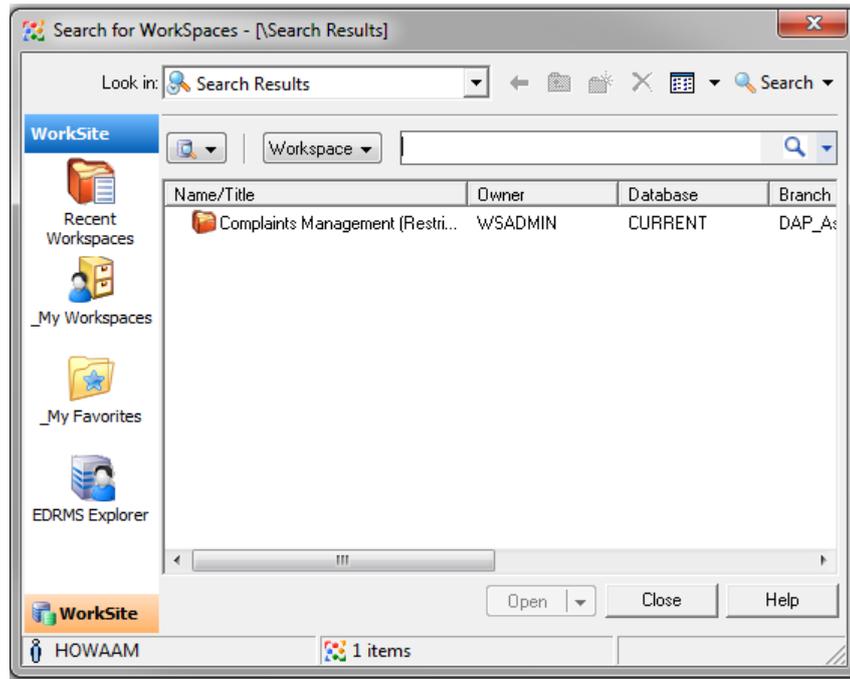
1. Select "Search Workspaces" on the right hand side of the Outlook home page.



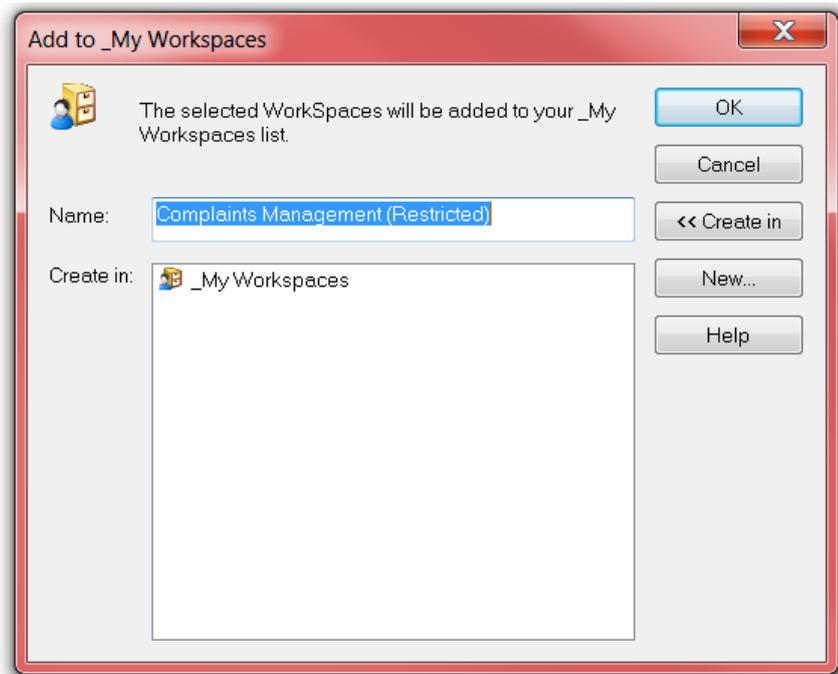
2. Type in the workspace number ws2009/5345 in the workspace number field and then press "Search"



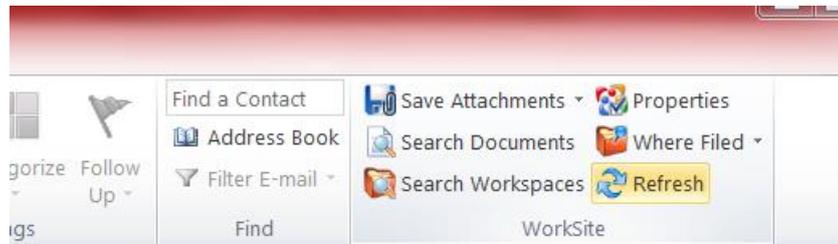
3. Select the "Complaints Management" workspace, then hit the down arrow next to "Open". Select "Add to\_My Workspaces"



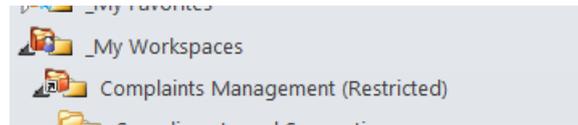
4. Select "OK"



5. Wait a few moments, and then hit **"Refresh"** on the top right hand corner of the Outlook home page.



6. The Workspace should now be visible under **"My Workspaces"**. Please note: this may take a few minutes to come up and you may need to exit and restart Outlook.



If you are experiencing difficulties, please contact the complaints officer to discuss.

**Attachment C**

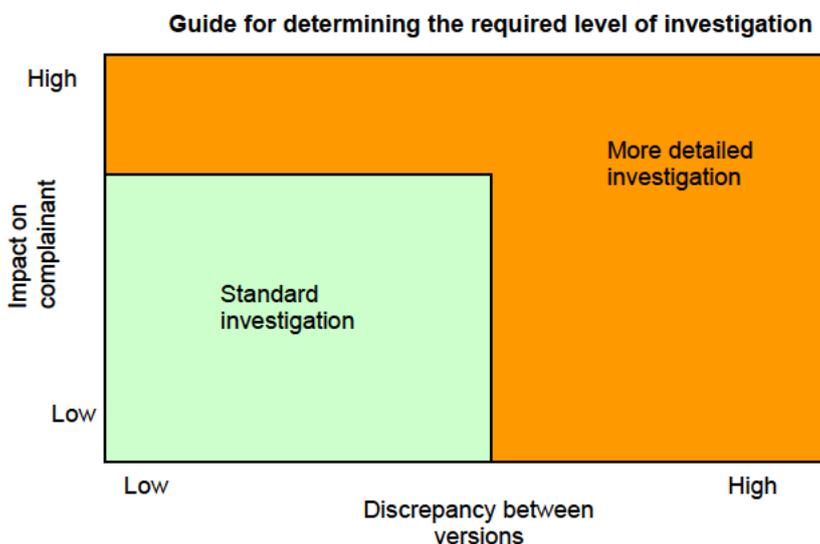
**COMPLAINT RECORDING TEMPLATE**

Complaint Information (to be completed by the DSS complaints officer)	
Complaint Recording System ID:	
Date of Complaint:	
Name of Complainant:	
Contact Details of Complainant:	
Name of Grant Recipient (if applicable):	
Details of Complaint:	
Key issues to be addressed in our response:	
The FCT recommend the following course of action:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	
The complainant has agreed to the above key concerns:	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Desired outcome of the complainant (if appropriate):	
Is this complaint anonymous:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	
Has the complainant's privacy consent been given:	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

**Attachment K****RISK ASSESSMENT**

When trying to determine the level of detail and the standard of 'evidence' required you should consider the gravity of the concerns raised. As the diagram below shows, the higher the impact on the complainant the more important it will be to seek further information.

When investigating a Family Relationship Centre, always default to a detailed investigation.

**A STANDARD INVESTIGATION**

Ask the Grant Recipient to complete the Standard Investigation Template.

**A MORE DETAILED INVESTIGATION**

If you have asked the Grant Recipient to complete the Standard Investigation Template, and still do not have enough information to make a finding you will need to seek further information that substantiates either version of events. Below are some suggestions on how you might progress:

- a) Undertake a review of relevant legislation and documentation:
  - Grant agreement
  - Approval Requirements
  - Operational Framework
  - Any documents provided to complainants by the organisation
  - Grant Recipient Service Charter
  - Client Complaints Policy
  - Client Complaints Procedures
  - Organisational Risk Profile and history
  
- b) Contact the parties involved such as the Grant Recipient staff or Manager, complainant or others to seek further written or verbal information. In particular you may request that they provide:
  - documentation, such as file notes relevant to events
  - the names of people involved, dates and times of events
  - copies of incident reports
  - details of staff qualifications
  - any video of the incident
  - an explanation of how the complainant came to their understanding of a process (e.g. – if they were unhappy that something took too long, why did they believe it would be quicker)

*Note: please ensure that any conversations are appropriately documented.*

- c) Seek legal advice from DSS's Legal and Compliance Group.

If the response from the Grant Recipient highlights significantly new or different information from that provided by the complainant it is important to consider if the complainant should be given a further opportunity to respond before you reach a final view. This should be assessed by the gravity of the new information and the impact it will have on the outcome.

It may be appropriate to call the complainant seeking further information, however if the information required is complex a letter may be the better option.

### **INVESTIGATION OF 'PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT' CONCERNS**

A more detailed investigation may **also be required if the complainant's key concerns relate to professional judgement decisions made by a Grant Recipient.**

The Commonwealth Ombudsman does not expect the Department to review professional judgment decisions. However it is appropriate for the Department to request further information from a Grant Recipient to ensure that appropriate administrative or legislative process was applied in the circumstances that led to the professional judgment decision in question.

An optional paragraph might be included in a response that has professional judgement concerns raised.

#### **OPTIONAL**

*Due to the uniqueness and complexity of individual case management, DSS does not have the expertise or authority to question the professional judgement of practitioners, or to express a view about the result of a delivered service.*

### **Commonwealth Ombudsman advice regarding Professional Judgement**

*The Ombudsman's statutory role permits investigation of "action that relates to a matter of administration". This is potentially very broad but, in general, the Ombudsman's office will be satisfied that an action related to a professional judgment does not warrant further investigation where:*

- it has been taken by an appropriately qualified person or someone acting under the direction of such a person*
- it has been taken following a process that complies with some ascertainable, authoritative and objective professional standard (e.g. legislation or a professional code)*
- it has been taken in accordance with any agreed or advertised process of the grant recipient*
- it, and the reasons for it, have been properly recorded.*

*The Ombudsman's office would also consider whether, in all the circumstances, the action was objectively within the range that might reasonably be available to be taken by a person in the position of the professional.*

**Attachment L**

**GRANT RECIPIENT STANDARD RESPONSE TEMPLATE**

Complaint Information (to be completed by the DSS complaints officer)	
DSS officer looking into the complaint:	
Contact Number:	
Complaint Recording System ID:	
Date of Complaint:	
Name of Complainant:	
Name of Grant Recipient:	
Details of Complaint:	
Key issues to be addressed in our response:	
Grant Recipient Response	
Please provide details in relation to this matter. <b>Note: Please ensure you address each concern and desired outcome.</b>	
What actions have been recommended / implemented to ensure this concern does not arise again?	
<p><b>Privacy Statement:</b></p> <p>I understand the Department of Social Services (DSS) collects this information as part of the Department’s investigation of a complaint. The information provided on the form will only be used or disclosed for the purpose of investigating the complaint. The information may be disclosed to other third parties directly involved in the complaint including but not limited to the complainant. My personal information will not otherwise be used for any purposes or be further disclosed to any individual, agency or organisation, unless required by law, or I provide consent.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Agreed      <input type="checkbox"/> Not Agreed</p>	
Grant Recipient employee who completed this template:	
Name:	
Position:	
Date:	

**Attachment N**

**COMPLAINT PROCESS REPORT TEMPLATE**

Complaint Information
Complaints Recording System Complaint ID:
Brief description of the complaint - <i>(Copy &amp; paste from Grant Recipient Response Template):</i>
Desired outcome of the complainant - <i>(Copy &amp; paste from Grant Recipient Response Template):</i>
Details of Process
Methodology (methods you used to find information such as interviews or review of paper files):
Findings
Findings against concerns raised and reasons for reaching these
Recommendations
<p>The following changes are recommended to ensure this doesn't occur:            (e.g. Action Officer / Grant Recipient recommend that xxxx changes be implemented to ensure that this situation does not occur in the future. and / or            That xxxx is informed of this matter.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> </ol> <p><b>Branch Manager to circle – Agree / Disagree / Please contact me to discuss</b></p>

**Note: the SES that clears this report is responsible for ensuring implementation of the Departmental change recommendations (if any).**



## Fact Sheet

### Complaints Coordinators

Detailed instructions for Coordinators can be found in the guide Instructions for Complaints Coordinators. Please refer to this guide before actioning any complaint.

As a complaints coordinator you will be the main point of contact for the DSS Feedback and Coordination Team (FCT).

The FCT will provide you with a complaint recording template that outlines the key concerns and desired outcomes of the complainant.

As the complaints coordinator you will be responsible for:

- Reviewing the complaint recording template and key concerns identified to ensure that the department (your area) can look into them under the funding agreement.
- Reviewing the complaint and undertaking an initial risk assessment to determine the severity of the matter.
- Determining the degree of sensitivity or risk for the complaint and working with the relevant Section/Branch Manager to agree on an appropriate process for handling the complaint.
- Allocating the complaint to an appropriate action officer.
- Advising the action officer of the agreed process and supporting them during the process.
- Meeting with the action officer after they have completed their initial consideration of the concerns to:
  - o complete a second risk assessment based on the information provided.
  - o determine whether more information needs to be gathered
  - o ensure that you have an agreed view on each of the **complainant's identified** concerns.
- Reviewing the draft response and ensuring that a copy is sent to the FCT for review.
- Checking that the relevant SES Officer has reviewed and cleared the report and draft response letter.
- Sending the cleared response letter to FCT for action.
- Ensuring the Action Officer and yourself have placed all documents into the FIRST folder.

Coordinators **DO NOT** send responses directly to complainants. This is the responsibility of the FCT. If at any stage it becomes clear that the consideration of any complaint will take longer than 28 days please advise the FCT immediately.

If you have any questions about any of your responsibilities please call the DSS Feedback Team.

## Instructions for Action Officers

These instructions have been provided to you to assist you in looking into a **complaint**. The following are the steps you will need to follow.

*Please ensure that you adhere to privacy principles throughout this process.*

1. You have received an email from a complaints coordinator advising that a complaint has been received and that you have been identified as the appropriate Action Officer.
2. The DSS Feedback Coordination Team (FCT) has provided you with access to the FIRSt folder relating to this case. (**Attachment J**) contains instructions on accessing the FIRSt workspace. The complaint recording template (**Attachment C**), is contained within the folder along with forms needed to complete the complaint, Grant Recipient Standard Response template (**Attachment L**), Complaint Process Report template (**Attachment N**) and Final Response template (**Attachment H**). You will need to view the template (**Attachment C**) and ensure that you are aware of the key concern(s) and desired outcome(s) of the complainant.
3. You do not need to seek consent from the complainant. This step is completed by FCT. You need to check if there is consent or if the complaint is to be dealt with anonymously.
4. The complaints coordinator in your area will have undertaken a risk assessment and may have discussed the complaint with the relevant Section Manager. The complaints coordinator will provide you with advice on the identified degree of sensitivity or risk, and the required level of consideration for this complaint.
5. If the complaint does not involve a third party grant recipient, advice about the process for dealing with the complaint will be contained in the complaint recording template. Once you have followed these steps you should notify your Coordinator of the outcome. They will advise the FCT. If the complaint does involve a third party grant recipient, then you will need to follow the steps outlined below.
6. You will need to contact the grant recipient to look into the complaint. For a standard complaint, you would ask the Grant Recipient to respond using the Grant Recipient Standard Response Template (**Attachment L**). You should send this template as soon as possible to give the grant recipient appropriate time to respond, this will then give you adequate time to write up the complainant response letter. If the complaint is more complex, this template may not be appropriate. When you contact the Grant Recipient, you should explain that they may be required to provide additional information at a later time. You should also ensure they are aware that the information they provide may be given to the complainant.
7. Meet with your coordinator to review the Grant Recipient's **initial response**. **At this point**, a decision may be made that further information is required. This may mean that you need to go back to the organisation to request further explanation or more information.
8. If at any stage it becomes clear that the consideration of the complaint will take longer than 28 days please advise the FCT immediately.
9. Once you and your coordinator agree that you have all the information you require based on the Coordinators second risk assessment, you will need to reach a view on each **of the complainant's identified concerns**. **You need to be confident that the Department could justify your conclusions to the Ombudsman/Media/Senate Estimates Committee.**

See (**Attachment M**) and (**Attachment O**) for information on reaching a view on each concern and drafting a response. You also need to ensure that you have enough **information to address the complainant's desired outcomes.**

10. Complete the complaint process report template (**Attachment N**). This is a mandatory step and the report must be placed in the relevant FIRST folder. The report needs to include all the steps taken by the Action Officer whilst looking into the concerns raised in the complaint.

11. Provide a copy of the complaint process report and draft a response letter (**Attachment H**) to your complaints coordinator for review.

12. You or your coordinator will then need to provide a copy of the report and draft response letter to the relevant SES Officer (generally Band One) for review and clearance. It may be of benefit to have the FCT look at the draft response prior to obtaining SES clearance.

13. If changes are made to the findings during the clearance process, you will need to ensure the complaint process report is updated to reflect and explain the new findings. You should be aware that under Freedom of Information the complainant, Grant Recipient or Commonwealth Ombudsman may request to see a copy of the complaint process report at a later date.

14. You or your coordinator will need to save a copy of the cleared response, complaint process report and other relevant documents to the relevant FIRSt folder.

15. Contact the Coordinator who allocated the complaint to you to let them know the response has been cleared and is in the FIRSt folder. The FCT is responsible for sending the complaint response - please **DO NOT** send the response directly from your area.

16. Advise the Grant Recipient of outcomes and ensure that they complete any recommended actions.

17. Ensure any internal concerns identified are appropriately actioned or escalated.

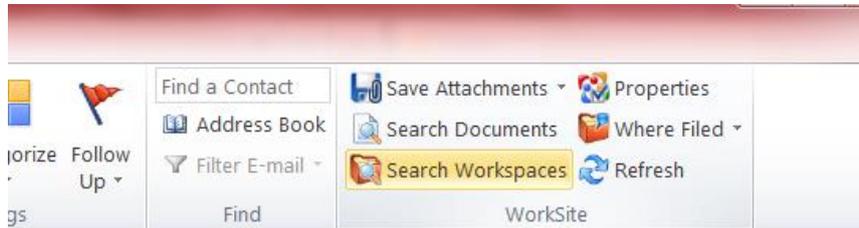
18. Ensure that the organisational risk profile for the Grant Recipient is updated if required.

Note: If at any time you feel that the response is not going to be finalised within the agreed period notify the Complaints Coordinator who can formally request an extension from the Complaints officer.

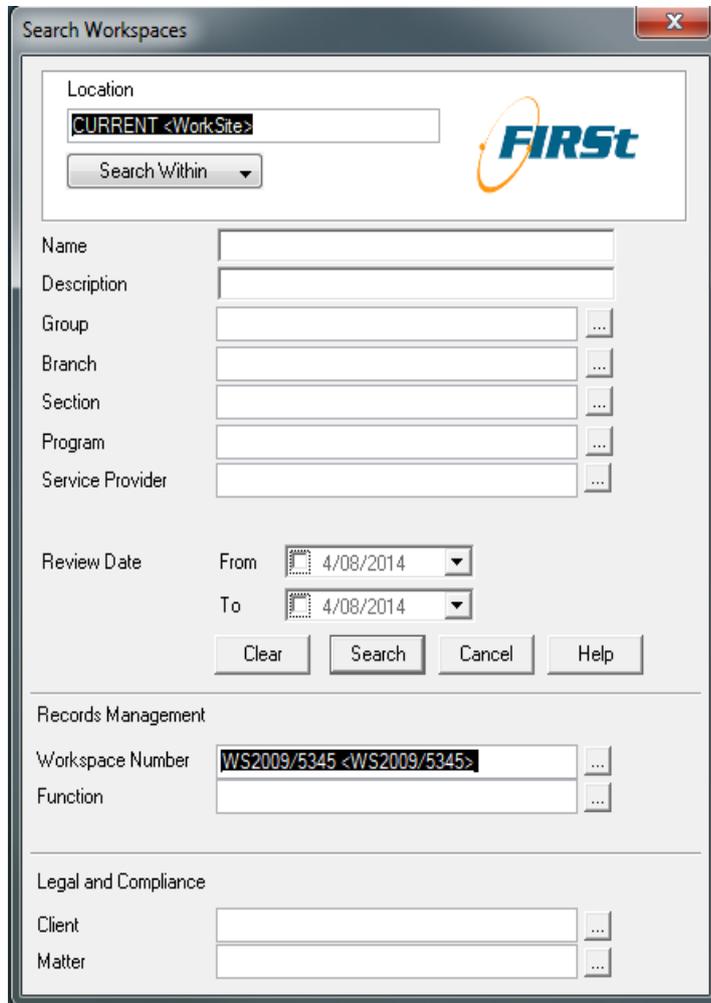
**Attachment J**

**Adding the Complaints Management Workspace in FIRST**

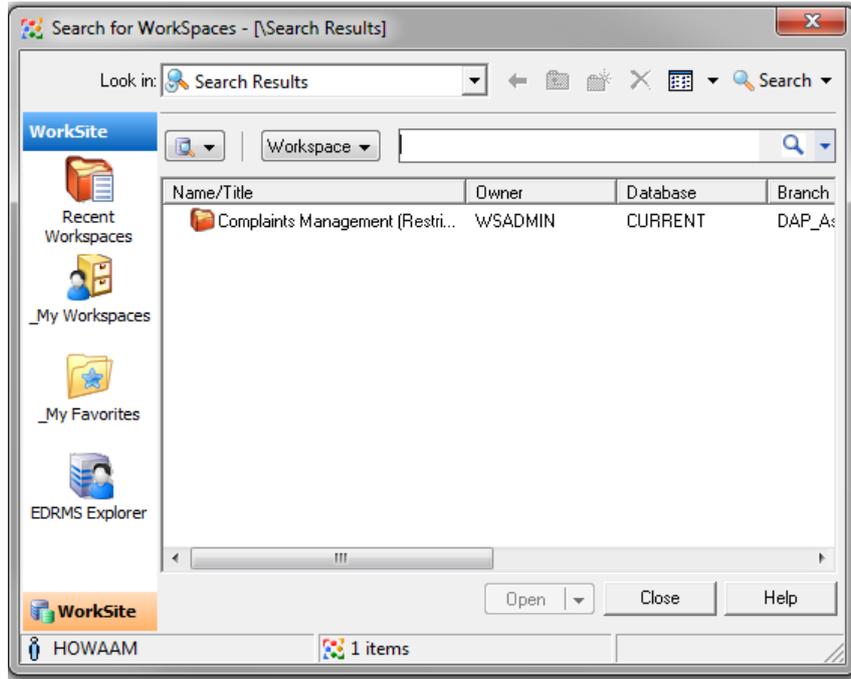
1. Select "Search Workspaces" on the right hand side of the Outlook home page.



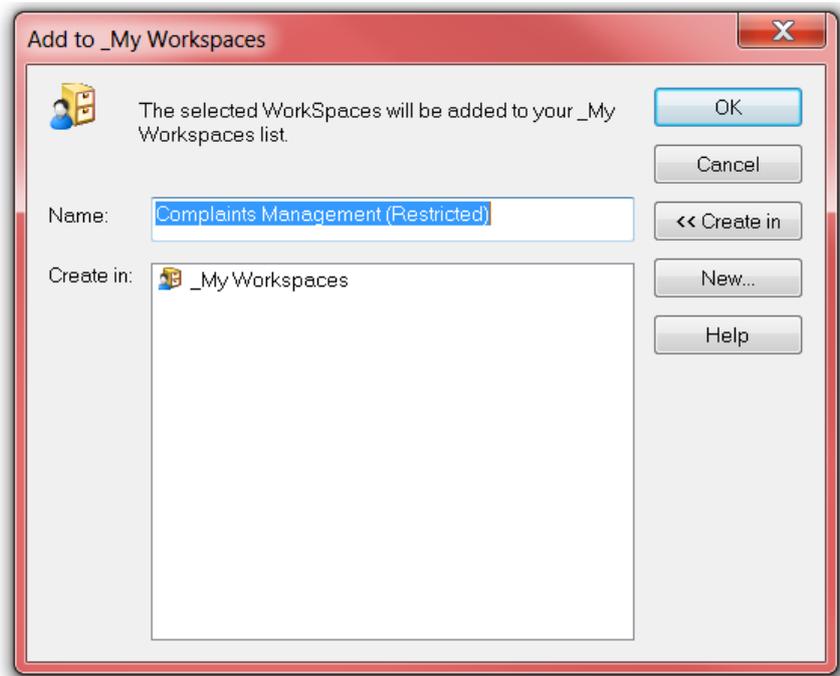
2. Type in the workspace number ws2009/5345 in the workspace number field and then press "Search"



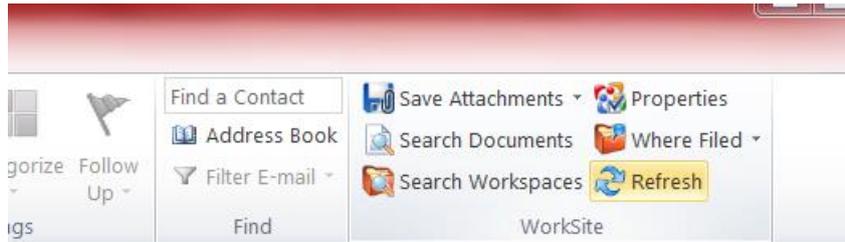
3. Select the "Complaints Management" workspace, then hit the down arrow next to "Open". Select "Add to \_My Workspaces"



4. Select "OK"



5. Wait a few moments, and then hit **"Refresh"** on the top right hand corner of the Outlook home page.



6. The Workspace should now be visible under **"My Workspaces"**. Please note: this may take a few minutes to come up and you may need to exit and restart Outlook.



If you are experiencing difficulties, please contact the complaints officer to discuss.

**Attachment C**

**COMPLAINT RECORDING TEMPLATE**

Complaint Information (to be completed by the DSS complaints officer)	
Complaint Recording System ID:	
Date of Complaint:	
Name of Complainant:	
Contact Details of Complainant:	
Name of Grant Recipient (if applicable):	
Details of Complaint:	
Key issues to be addressed in our response:	
The FCT recommend the following course of action:	
The complainant has agreed to the above key concerns: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Desired outcome of the complainant (if appropriate):	
Is this complaint anonymous: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Has the complainant's privacy consent been given: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
DSS is committed to continuous improvement and ensuring it provides the best services for complainants. As part of this commitment, complainants may be contacted in the future to provide feedback about the service they receive. Do you consent to being contacted in the future to provide feedback on our service: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

**Attachment L**

**GRANT RECIPIENT STANDARD RESPONSE TEMPLATE**

Complaint Information (to be completed by the DSS complaints officer)	
DSS officer looking into the complaint:	
Contact Number:	
Complaint Recording System ID:	
Date of Complaint:	
Name of Complainant:	
Name of Grant Recipient:	
Details of Complaint:	
Key issues to be addressed in our response:	
Grant Recipient Response	
Please provide details in relation to this matter. <u>Note: Please ensure you address each concern and desired outcome.</u>	
What actions have been recommended / implemented to ensure this concern does not arise again?	
<p><b>Privacy Statement:</b></p> <p>I understand the Department of Social Services (DSS) collects this information as part of the Department’s investigation of a complaint. The information provided on the form will only be used or disclosed for the purpose of investigating the complaint. The information may be disclosed to other third parties directly involved in the complaint including but not limited to the complainant. My personal information will not otherwise be used for any purposes or be further disclosed to any individual, agency or organisation, unless required by law, or I provide consent.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Agreed      <input type="checkbox"/> Not Agreed</p>	
Grant Recipient employee who completed this template:	
Name:	
Position:	
Date:	

## Attachment M

### Reaching a view on each concern

You must review the information that you have been provided and reach a view on each of the complainant's key concerns.

The version of events provided by the grant recipient and the complainant may be very different and this can make it difficult to come to a conclusion. Below are some possible scenarios and examples of decisions you might reach:

**a) Evidence provided by both parties is consistent, or, you have documented evidence that allows you to make a clear decision.**

E.g. You raised a concern about incorrect information being available on <grant recipient's> website.

<grant recipient> has advised that this was the result of an oversight when the website was last updated.

I have confirmed that the <grant recipient> has now updated their website and they apologise for the error and any confusion caused.

**b) Inconsistent evidence, but on the balance of probability you will be able to reach a view.**

E.g. a) You raised a concern that your mediator did not intervene when you requested the mediation session end.

The <grant recipient> has advised that the mediator did not hear your initial request to end the session. <grant recipient> noted that the mediator stopped the session as soon as she heard your request.

The Department considers that the explanation provided by <grant recipient> is appropriate and no further action will be taken.

E.g. b) You raised a concern that <grant recipient> did not adequately address your request for additional mediation.

<grant recipient> advised that they were unaware that you were seeking additional mediation, however, they have advised that to avoid misunderstandings in the future, they will <insert grant recipients suggested changes>.

The Department considers that <grant recipient> could have done more to ensure that you were aware of services available. However we are satisfied that the changes proposed by the centre will ensure that this problem does not happen again in the future.

**c) Inconsistent evidence, and on the basis of innocent until proven guilty, no finding can be made.**

E.g. You raised a concern that <grant recipient> did not phone you prior to sending a fax, despite having a verbal agreement with them to do so and this was a breach of your privacy.

<grant recipient> have advised that no instructions were given to their office to phone you before sending a fax.

The information provided to the Department on this matter is inconsistent. Therefore the Department is unable to reach a conclusion in relation to this matter and no further action will be taken.

When making a finding you need to be confident that the Department could justify it to the Ombudsman/Media/Senate Estimates Committee. In some cases you may need to seek further information to do this, but it is important to recognise that it may also be appropriate for the Department not to make a finding.

If a finding is made that indicates fault or error on the part of the Grant Recipient it is important to ensure that the Grant Recipient is aware that the Department has made this finding before finalising a response to the complainant. If the Grant Recipient **does not agree with the Department's finding** legal advice must be sought prior to finalising a response to the complainant to ensure that any potential legal ramifications are considered.

**Attachment N**

**COMPLAINT PROCESS REPORT TEMPLATE**

Complaint Information
Complaints Recording System Complaint ID:
Brief description of the complaint - <i>(Copy &amp; paste from Grant Recipient Response Template)</i> :
Desired outcome of the complainant - <i>(Copy &amp; paste from Grant Recipient Response Template)</i> :
Details of process
Methodology (methods you used to find information such as interviews or review of paper files):
Findings
Findings against concerns raised and reasons for reaching these
Recommendations
The following changes are recommended to ensure this doesn't occur: (e.g. Action Officer / Grant Recipient recommend that xxxx changes be implemented to ensure that this situation does not occur in the future. <b>and / or</b> That xxxx is informed of this matter.
3.
4.
<b>Branch Manager to circle – Agree / Disagree / Please contact me to discuss</b>

**Note: the SES that clears this report is responsible for ensuring implementation of the Departmental change recommendations (if any).**

## Attachment O

### **TIP SHEET – DRAFTING RESPONSES**

#### **Ensure that the response clearly addresses each concern and the desired outcome(s)**

- The final response should be presented in a style and language that the complainant can understand and should deal with each concern or grievance raised in the complaint.
- The response should:
  - avoid negative words where possible
  - get to the point
  - be empathetic
  - use everyday language (refer to the DSS Style Guide)
  - not use names, for privacy reasons you should refer to people as “the DSS Officer” or the “Grant Recipient employee”.
- Many complainants mistakenly believe that all aspects of their complaint were not fully examined or dealt with.
- The response should clearly state the views that have been reached against **each of the complainant’s concerns and an explanation of how each view was reached** (refer **Attachment M** on Reaching a view on each concern).
- The response should also address the desired outcome/s of the complainant. In particular if you have found that the complainants concern is true, you may need to consider potential remedies such as:
  - a better or fuller explanation
  - an apology
  - changing or reconsidering a decision
  - expediting action
  - altering business processes so it **doesn’t reoccur**
  - removing a debt or penalty, and
  - providing financial compensation.
- Your response should advise the complainant of any actions that will be taken as a result of the complaint. The response should also outline if there are other options available to the complainant.

#### **Response Template**

Name  
Email/Address

Dear

I am writing in response to the concerns you raised with the Department of Social Services (the Department) on (INSERT DATE) about the service you received at (INSERT NAME OF ORG).

The Department has raised the matters you identified with (ORG) who manage **this service. The Department’s role is to look into your concerns and the responses provided by (ORG) to determine if the terms and conditions of their grant agreement with the Department have been met.**

**OPTIONAL**

*The Department's investigation found that in response to your complaints, (ORG) has taken steps to ensure that its protocols are strengthened and that staff are fully aware of their obligations under these protocols so that this should not happen to others in future.*

**OPTIONAL**

*Due to the uniqueness and complexity of individual case management, DSS does not have the expertise or authority to question the professional judgement of practitioners, or to express a view about the result of a delivered service.*

Please find the following detailed response to each of your concerns identified in your correspondence with the Department.

**3. WRITE OUT THE FIRST KEY CONCERN**

Explain here what the (ORG) said and what we determined based on this to explain the finding.

The Department finds that (make a finding here – some examples are listed below).

**4. WRITE OUT THE SECOND KEY CONCERN**

Explain here what the (ORG) said and what we determined based on this to explain the finding.

The Department finds that (make a finding here – some examples are listed below).

**EXAMPLES OF FINDINGS:**

- The information provided to the Department on this matter is inconsistent. Therefore; the Department is unable to reach a conclusion in relation to this matter and no further action will be taken.
- The Department considers that the explanation provided by the (ORG) is appropriate and no further action will be taken.
- The Department considers that the (ORG) could have done more to ensure that you were (INSERT ISSUE). However, we are satisfied that the changes proposed by the (ORG) will ensure that this problem does not happen again in the future.

Thank you for bringing these matters to the attention of the Department. All feedback helps us to ensure that our providers deliver high quality services to the community.

**I hope you are satisfied with the Department's handling of your complaint. If you are not, you are able to take this matter to the Commonwealth Ombudsman who can be contacted on 1300 362 072.**



## Fact Sheet

### Complaints Action Officers

Detailed instructions for Action Officers can be found in the guide Instructions for Action Officers. Please refer to this guide before actioning any complaint.

As a complaints action officer you will be responsible for drafting responses to complaints allocated to your area.

The DSS Feedback and Coordination Team (FCT) will provide you with a complaint recording template that outlines the key concerns and desired outcomes of the complainant.

As the complaints action officer you will be responsible for:

- Reviewing the complaint recording template and addressing all key concerns and desired outcomes of the complainant.
- Contacting the third party grant recipient (if appropriate) and look into the issues.
- Working with your Complaints Coordinator to reach a view on each of the **complainant's identified concerns**. You must be confident that the Department could justify your conclusions to the Ombudsman, Media (if necessary) or Senate Estimates Committee.
- Completing the complaint process report template and providing a copy of the report and draft response letter to your complaints coordinator for review.
- Ensuring that the relevant SES Officer reviews and clears your report and draft response letter.
- Updating the complaints process report to reflect any changes made during the clearance process and saving cleared copies in the relevant FIRSt folder.
- Notifying the Complaints Coordinator when the report and draft letter have been SES cleared and saved in the relevant FIRSt folder.
- Advising the Grant Recipient (if appropriate) of outcomes and ensuring that they complete any recommended actions and ensuring that any internal concerns identified are appropriately actioned or escalated.
- Ensuring that the organisation risk profile for the Grant Recipient is updated if required.

Action Officers **DO NOT** send responses directly to complainants. This is the responsibility of the FCT. If at any stage it becomes clear that the consideration of any complaint will take longer than **28 days** please advise the FCT immediately.

If you have any questions about any of your responsibilities please call the DSS Feedback Team.



## Fact Sheet Enquiries Coordinators

Detailed instructions for Coordinators can be found in the guide Instructions for DSS Feedback Coordination Team (FCT). Please refer to this guide before actioning any enquiry.

As an enquiries coordinator you will be the main point of contact for the DSS Feedback and Coordination Team (FCT).

As the enquiries coordinator you will be responsible for:

- Reviewing the enquiry and determining that your area is best placed to provide a response.
- Allocate the enquiry to the most appropriate person (action officer) to provide a response or alternatively advise the FCT that your team is not the appropriate area.
- Discuss with the action officer the level of response required, and decide whether you need to seek Section/Branch Manager clearance on the response.
- Advising the action officer of the agreed process and supporting them during the process.
- Track the enquiries progress, the Enquiries Officer may contact you seeking an update.
- **When you receive a response from the action officer, forward from your area's mailbox (cc'ing the Feedback mailbox), or alternatively send to the Feedback mailbox for response.**

Occasionally emails are received that do not require a response, and these are **forwarded to Enquiries Coordinators as 'Information Only', to be distributed to** appropriate stakeholders. Any further distribution is at your discretion.

If you have any questions about any of your responsibilities please call the DSS Feedback Team.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DEALING WITH THE COMMONWEALTH OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE (COO)

The Commonwealth Ombudsman has broad powers to investigate Commonwealth public administration where complaints have been raised about the administrative actions of Australian Government agencies.

The Ombudsman is impartial and independent and is not an advocate for complainants or for agencies.

#### Contact arrangements

DSS has a formal channel in place for complaints initiated by the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office under Section 8 of the Ombudsman Act 1976. Commonwealth Ombudsman's are managed through the s47E mailbox.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office may contact the Department:

#### Ombudsman's Complaints

DSS's single entry point for complaints raised by the Commonwealth Ombudsman regarding client's dissatisfaction with the complaint handling process undertaken by DSS is the DSS Feedback Coordination Team (FCT). The Complaints Officer within this team works in collaboration with the responsible line areas of DSS and DSS funded grant recipients to respond to these complaints.

#### Ombudsman's Complaints handling process

##### Background

The complaints management process that DSS has in place ensures that any problems with the services or decisions of DSS or a DSS funded grant recipient are taken seriously and dealt with promptly. When a complaint is finalised by the Department, the letter sent to the complainant always includes the details for the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office. This ensures that the complainant is aware that if they are not happy with the way DSS dealt with their complaint, they can escalate the matter to the Ombudsman.

##### Steps for handling Mainstream Ombudsman's Complaints

The steps for handling Commonwealth Ombudsman's complaints are as follows:

1. The Commonwealth Ombudsman writes to the DSS Feedback Coordination Team (FCT) informing them that they are investigating a complaint handling process under Section 8 of the *Ombudsman's Act*.
2. DSS has **28 days** from receipt of this notification to respond to the Ombudsman's questions. In circumstances where the timeframe is less than 28 days, or where a response may take longer than 28 days, FCT can approach the Ombudsman's office with a request for an extension.
3. The FCT:
  - Checks the Feedback Management System (FMS) for the original complaint
  - Reviews the original complaint and response provided
  - Updates the original complaint on FMS to reflect that the Ombudsman is now investigating the complaint and selects the "Ombudsman" field in FMS system
  - Enters the new S8 approach from the Ombudsman's Office onto the Ombudsmans Complaints System as a new complaint record and links the new record to the existing complaint record by listing the FMS Complaint Number in the relevant field and updating the notes field

- Sends the letter **from the Ombudsman's Office** to the Coordinator who originally answered the complaint requesting that they draft a response and copies in relevant managers. In some cases FCT assesses whether the response can be handled by FCT with input from the Coordinator who originally actioned the complaint
- Creates a folder in the FIRSt workspace under the Ombudsman and enquiries where all the relevant information can be stored.
- Forwards the final response back to Commonwealth Ombudsman and closes the record on SharePoint.

4. The Coordinator:

- Undertakes a risk assessment
- Gathers all the relevant supporting document
- Consults with the relevant SES officer on an appropriate approach
- **Drafts a response to the Ombudsman's letter ensuring that all questions are addressed.**
- Sends the draft response and relevant documents that support answers to the **Ombudsman's questions to the FCT** for review.
- Obtains the relevant SES officer's clearance of the response and permission to send relevant supporting documentation.
- Sends the cleared response and supporting documentation to the FCT who will **forward to the relevant investigator within the Ombudsman's office** and file the response in the appropriate FIRSt folder.

**Note:** It is important that you do not refer to any documents in your response that you are not able to provide upon request.

**Due dates are set by the Ombudsman's Office.** If coordinators are unable to meet the deadline they must inform FCT as soon as possible. The FCT will then contact the Ombudsman's Office to request an extension.

### **Protection for Agency Staff**

The Ombudsman Act provides protection for an agency or person who gives the Ombudsman information when requested, or because it reasonably appears relevant to an investigation. Information given to the Ombudsman's office, for example by an agency officer authorised to do so:

- Cannot be used in evidence against the person (other than for giving false or misleading information)
- Does not breach the Privacy Act 1988
- Does not affect a claim that may be made for legal professional privilege.

### **What happens if the Commonwealth Ombudsman is satisfied with our response?**

If the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office is satisfied with our response they will issue a **S12 notice-No comments or suggestions** and close the investigation.

FCT will note the **S12 notice** on the Ombudsman's Complaints System and close the matter.

### **What happens if the Commonwealth Ombudsman is not satisfied with our response?**

#### **S12 notice – Comment/suggestion**

If the Commonwealth Ombudsman is not satisfied with our response they will write a formal letter to the Branch Manager, Cross Portfolio and Information Branch known as a **s12 notice-Comment/suggestion**. This notice will detail their investigation and will identify anything that they consider warrants comment or the making of a suggestion and offers the Department a right of reply.

Action Officers, Coordinators and the FCT work together in gathering supporting information to draft a response for clearance.

**DSS's response to a notice is usually escalated to senior officers within the Department and can be signed off by the relevant Deputy Secretary, if necessary.**

If the Commonwealth Ombudsman is still not satisfied after reviewing our response to the to ***s12 notice – comment/suggestion*** they will issue the Department with a further ***s12 notice-comment/suggestion and close the investigaion***. The ***s12 notice-comment/suggestion*** has categories and are reported in the Ombudsman's annual report. The most common ***s12 notice-comment/suggestions*** by our department are Unreasonable delay; Inadequate advice, explanation or reasons; Procedural deficiency; Flawed agency processes or systems and Inadequate knowledge/training of agency staff.



## Fact Sheet

### Dealing with the COO – Mainstream Complaints

Detailed instructions can be found in the guide *Dealing with the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office*. Please refer to this guide before actioning any Ombudsman's requests.

When a complaint is finalised by the Department, the letter sent to the complainant always includes the details for the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office. This ensures that the complainant is aware that if they are not happy with the way DSS has dealt with their complaint, they can escalate the matter to the Ombudsman.

#### **Steps for handling Ombudsman's Complaints**

The steps for handling Commonwealth Ombudsman's complaints are as follows:

1. The Commonwealth Ombudsman writes to the DSS Feedback Coordination Team (FCT) informing them that they are investigating a complaint handling process under Section 8 of the *Ombudsman's Act*.
2. DSS has **28 days** from receipt of this notification to respond to the Ombudsman's questions. In circumstances where the timeframe is less than 28 days, or where a response may take longer than 28 days, FCT can approach the Ombudsman's office with a request for an extension.
3. The FCT:
  - Checks the Feedback Management System (FMS) for the original complaint
  - Reviews the original complaint and response provided
  - Updates the original complaint on FMS to reflect that the Ombudsman is now investigating the complaint and selects the "Ombudsman" field in FMS system
  - Enters the new S8 approach from the Ombudsman's Office onto the Ombudsman's Complaints System as a new complaint record and links the new record to the existing complaint record by listing the FMS Complaint Number in the relevant field and updating the notes field
  - Sends the letter from the Ombudsman's Office to the Coordinator who originally answered the complaint requesting that they draft a response and copies in relevant managers. In some cases FCT assesses whether the response can be handled by FCT with input from the Coordinator who originally actioned the complaint
  - Creates a folder in the FIRSt workspace under the Ombudsman and enquiries where all the relevant information can be stored.

- Forwards the final response back to Commonwealth Ombudsman and closes the record on SharePoint.
- The Coordinator:
- Undertakes a risk assessment
- Gathers all the relevant supporting document
- Consults with the relevant SES officer on an appropriate approach
- **Drafts a response to the Ombudsman's letter ensuring that all questions are addressed.**
- Sends the draft response and relevant documents that support answers to the **Ombudsman's questions to the FCT for review.**
- **Obtains the relevant SES officer's clearance of the response and permission to send relevant supporting documentation.**
- Sends the cleared response and supporting documentation to the FCT who will **forward to the relevant investigator within the Ombudsman's office and file the response in the appropriate FIRSt folder.**

If the Commonwealth Ombudsman's office is satisfied with our response they will issue a *s12 notice-no comments or suggestions*. If they are unhappy with our response they will issue a *s12 notice-comments/suggestions* and offer the Department a right of reply. If after reviewing our reply, the Ombudsman is still unsatisfied they will issue the Department with a further *s12 notice-comments/suggestions and close the investigation*.

If you have any questions about any of your responsibilities please call the DSS Feedback Coordination Team.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct

These instructions have been provided to assist you in dealing with unreasonable complainant conduct.

It is sometimes necessary to deal with complainants who exhibit challenging behaviour or people who place unreasonable demands on the Department. This can be both stressful and time-consuming for staff involved.

Staff may be in communication with complainants using digital technologies that could be considered difficult behaviour or in some cases classed as cyber-bullying. Cyber bullying via digital technologies could reasonably be considered humiliating, intimidating, threatening or demanding to a person, or group of people, and which creates a risk to health and safety. Examples may include harassment via phone, social media, e-mail, or setting up an offensive personal website or blog. While-cyber bullying typically involves an accumulation of instances of objectionable behaviour, single instances of online abuse and harassment may constitute cyber-bullying.

At the most extreme end of the scale, it may be necessary to develop and implement a particular strategy for dealing with a particularly difficult person in order to manage the process effectively. It is preferable that this occur as early on in the process as possible.

Despite challenging or difficult behaviour, departmental staff should communicate in a polite, respectful and firm manner. It should be made clear to the complainant that they are expected to behave in a courteous manner and to cooperate with Departmental staff.

If the person demonstrates unreasonable behaviour it should not be tolerated. A complainant can be told that a telephone call will be terminated unless moderate language is used, that threats are unacceptable and may be reported to the police, that rude and intemperate correspondence may not be answered or may be returned, or that special contact arrangements with the complainant will be implemented. In special circumstances, a senior officer or Manager may need to write or speak directly to a complainant.

It may, on occasion, be necessary to implement a communications strategy to place **appropriate boundaries around the Department's interaction with a complainant**. This may occur where the complainant is making unreasonable demands or where excessive frequency of contact leads to a consequent drain on Departmental resources.

An example of a communication plan that was put in place for a complainant that was continually contacting the Department and displaying unreasonable behaviour can be viewed at (**Attachment P**) as well as the letter advising the complainant that a communication plan was being put in place can be seen at (**Attachment Q**).

It is also important to remember that dealing with unreasonable complainant conduct can be difficult for the staff member involved. It is therefore important that staff are given an opportunity to debrief after dealing with unreasonable complainant conduct. This may mean having a discussion with your immediate supervisor or another manager who is available. It could also mean contacting EAP Services if necessary.

**Attachment P**

**Communication Plan for Departmental Dealings with Mr W**

**1. What Mr W has been asked to do (see Attachment W)**

- Mr W has been told that DSS has considered his complaint and considers the complaint finalised.
- Mr W has been directed to cease contacting DSS employees.
- Mr W has been told that he can put new information to the Department, but only in writing via [complaints@DSS.gov.au](mailto:complaints@DSS.gov.au).
- Any correspondence will be filed without acknowledgement, unless a substantially new issue or information is raised, which the Department considers warrants attention.

**2. What you must do**

**(a) If Mr W contacts you by telephone**

- Politely remind Mr W that he has been asked to communicate only in writing, and you will hang-up.
- **Hang-up**.
- Do **not** engage in a conversation with Mr W.
- Do **not** refer Mr W to contact the Complaints telephone line.

**(b) If Mr W contacts you in writing**

- Forward the written communication to [complaints@DSS.gov.au](mailto:complaints@DSS.gov.au).
- Do **not** acknowledge receipt of any written communication. The Complaints Section will consider all written correspondence from Mr W and assess whether to acknowledge the correspondence.

**(c) If you know a DSS employee has communicated with Mr W in writing or by telephone**

- For example, a DSS employee sends you a written file note of a conversation with Mr W.
- Notify [complaints@DSS.gov.au](mailto:complaints@DSS.gov.au). The Complaints Section will provide the DSS employee with these instructions and remind them of the protocol for communicating with Mr W.

**Attachment Q**

**Letter sent to Mr W to indicate the Department's position.**

Dear Mr W,

**COMPLAINTS RE ORGANISATION**

I refer to your numerous telephone calls and correspondence concerning your complaints about X organisation.

**As per the Department's previous correspondence, and in particular the letter from Mr XX of DATE**, the Department considers that your complaints have been dealt with and no further action will be taken.

Nevertheless, you have continued to engage in what the Department considers to be unreasonable complaint conduct, including repeatedly contacting Departmental staff by telephone, and on some occasions using a false name to do so.

Previously, you have been asked to communicate with the Department only in relation to new information, and only in writing or through the Complaints telephone service.

The purpose of this letter is to notify you that you must cease contacting Departmental staff, including through the Complaints telephone service. If you attempt to contact Department staff by telephone, staff have been instructed not to accept the call.

If you wish to put to the Department any new information, you can do so, but only in writing via the Complaints email address [complaints@DSS.gov.au](mailto:complaints@DSS.gov.au). Any further correspondence will be filed without acknowledgement unless a substantially new issue or information is raised, which the Department considers warrants attention.

In the event that you continue to harass Departmental staff, the Department reserves all of its rights to take appropriate action to protect staff, including by seeking an appropriate restraining order.

Yours sincerely

XXXX  
Branch Manager  
XXXX Branch

DATE



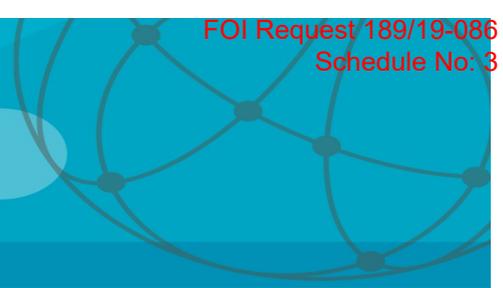
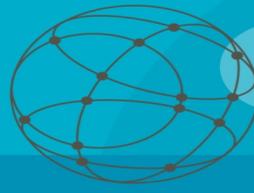
## Fact Sheet

### Managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct

It is sometimes necessary to deal with complainants who exhibit challenging behaviour or people who place unreasonable demands on the Department. This can be both stressful and time-consuming for staff involved. At the most extreme end of the scale, it may also generate the need for a specific strategy to be put in place in order to manage a particularly challenging client.

#### **Strategies for Dealing with Unreasonable Complainant Conduct**

- Departmental staff should communicate in a polite, respectful and firm manner. It should be made clear to the complainant that they are also expected to be courteous and to cooperate with Departmental staff.
- **If a person is unreasonably persistent, it may be necessary to say "no"** For example, to advise that a complaint issue will not be looked into any further, an unproductive telephone call will be terminated, or no further correspondence on the complaint will be answered. The complainant may need to be told that they have reached the end of the line.
- If a person makes an unreasonable demand, limits should be set on what the Department will do. For example, the key concerns that the Department can look into need to be clearly communicated to the complainant in addition to identifying things that are out of scope.
- If a person demonstrates an unreasonable lack of cooperation, the Department should set conditions. For example, key supporting correspondence or documents would be **required before the Department committed to looking into a person's complaint.**
- If the person makes an unreasonable argument then these issues should be identified and put aside. For example, where the complainant holds irrational beliefs or exaggerates issues, limits will need to be placed on what the Department will examine and the style of communication expected.
- If the person demonstrates unreasonable behaviour it should not be tolerated. A complainant can be told that a telephone call will be terminated unless moderate language is used, that threats are unacceptable and may be reported to the police, that rude and intemperate correspondence may not be answered or may be returned, or that special contact arrangements with the complainant will be implemented. In special circumstances, a senior officer or Director may need to write or speak directly to a complainant.



## Department Of Social Services (DSS)

### Frequently Asked Questions – Complaints Process

Thank you for raising your concerns with the Department. This page provides useful information in relation to the complaints process.

If at any time you need to discuss your complaint or seek an update on your complaint please contact the DSS Complaints Officer:

Ph: 1800 634 035  
Fax: (02) 6133 8442  
Email: [complaints@dss.gov.au](mailto:complaints@dss.gov.au)  
Mail: DSS Complaints, PO Box 7576,  
Canberra Business Centre, 2610

#### How long will my complaint take?

The complaint process takes 28 days from the day the department receives your agreement to the key concerns and signed privacy consent form.

#### What is a privacy consent form?

A privacy consent form seeks permission for DSS to disclose personal information about you to the third party and for the third party to provide DSS with your private information in order to look into your complaint. You will be sent a privacy consent form at the same time you receive a letter with the key concerns the department will look into.

#### What happens if my complaint takes longer than 28 days?

If the department is unable to complete looking into your complaint within 28 days the DSS Complaints Officer will inform you in writing that your matter has not been finalised and a response will be sent to you as soon as possible.

#### What happens if I am not providing a privacy consent form because I want to remain anonymous?

If you have not already done so please ensure you let the DSS Complaints Officer know that you want to remain anonymous. You do not need to provide a signed privacy consent form but you still need to agree to the key concerns for the complaint to progress.

#### Who will look into my complaint?

Once you have agreed to the key concerns and provided a signed privacy consent form your complaint will be allocated to the relevant area of the Department to look into.

#### How will my complaint be looked into?

The Department will contact the third party involved and request a response to each of the key concerns along with any additional information to assist in the complaint. Once a response has been received the Department will write a response to each of the key concerns based on the third parties response and the information provided by you and determine if there has been any fault, error or breach of the grant agreement.

#### How will my complaint be looked into if I want to remain anonymous?

The Department will contact the third party involved and request a response to each of the key concerns. This request will have no reference to you or your identity. Once a response has been received the Department will write a response to each of the key concerns based on the third parties response and the information provided by you and determine if there has been any fault, error or breach of the grant agreement.

Please note that without privacy consent it will be difficult for the department to comprehensively address your concerns.

#### Why have some of my concerns not been listed as key concerns?

Your concerns may not be listed as a key concern because they are not in scope and the Department is unable to look into them. You will be advised of this in writing.

#### Why is some of the information I provided not in the key concerns?

The information you provide is condensed into key concerns. All the information we collect from you in relation to your complaint is noted, provided to the relevant area of the department and taken into account when addressing your concerns.

#### What if I have a further key concern to add to my complaint?

If you have a further key concern to add please contact the DSS Complaints Officer immediately to discuss. The ability to add further key concerns will depend on where the complaints process is up to.

#### What if I have further information to provide?

If you have further information to support your complaint please provide this information to the DSS Complaints Officer and they will ensure this information is considered when looking into your concerns.

#### What will happen at the end of the process?

You will receive a letter from the department with a response to each of the key concerns you have agreed to. The department will make a finding on each of the key concerns. If a finding indicates fault, error or breach of the grant agreement by the third party involved they will officially be informed.

#### What do I do if I am not happy with the way the Department looked into my complaint?

If you are not satisfied with the result of your complaint or how it has been handled you can complain to the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

Ph: 1300 362 072

Email: [ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au](mailto:ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au)

Web: [www.ombudsman.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au)

Post: GPO Box 442, Canberra ACT 2601

Complaints to the Ombudsman can be made in writing, by phone, in person or by using an online complaint form.



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Social Services**

**COMPLAINT PRIVACY CONSENT FORM**

I \_\_\_\_\_(name) give consent to the Department of Social Services to disclose my personal information to any individuals or organisations, including third parties, involved in the complaint for the purposes of looking into and reporting on my complaint.

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

I also give my consent to any individuals or organisations involved in the complaint to disclose my personal information to the Department of Social Services for the purpose of looking into and reporting on my complaint by the Department.

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

If you are under 18 years of age your parent/guardian will also need to sign this on your behalf

Full name of parent/guardian \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of parent/guardian \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

The Department of Social Services is collecting information about you to assist in the effective management of your complaint as well as for training purposes. The DSS Privacy Policy has been prepared in accordance with the Australian Privacy Principles and contains information about how you can access and correct personal information held by DSS about you. It also contains information about how you can complain about a breach of the Australian Privacy Principles and how DSS will deal with such a complaint. The DSS Privacy Policy can be found on our website at [www.dss.gov.au/privacy-policy](http://www.dss.gov.au/privacy-policy).



## CLIENT AGENCY REFERRAL

Client Agency Information	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DSS Feedback and Complaints Team <input type="checkbox"/> National Customer Service Line <input type="checkbox"/> DES Feedback (DES Participation and Provider Support Section) <input type="checkbox"/> Complaint Resolution and Referral Service <input type="checkbox"/> Other (i.e. Policy Area) _____	
Client Agency Contact Officer	
Date Complaint received by Client Agency	
Complaint Recording System ID	
Date Response Due back to Client Agency	Click or tap to enter a date.
Action Requested of Feedback Team	
<p><b>Note: not all services are available to all Client Agencies. Please contact us for more information.</b></p> <p>(Please select one or more options)</p>	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Desktop Assessment</b> Investigate, analyse and collate information from Client Agency data systems, e.g. govGPS, ESSWeb.	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Coordinate Information</b> Contact Grant Recipient seeking information based on the questions provided from the requester i.e. Ministerial, Ombudsman's and other policy requests.	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Contact Grant Recipient</b> Contact Grant Recipient seeking information based on the presented issues in the request. The CoE Feedback team is responsible for determining the questions.	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>End-to-End Complaint Resolution</b> Address the complainant's matter, which may include any or all of the above steps, as well as consultation with relevant guidelines, Deeds or stakeholders. Feedback on the outcome of the complaints review will be provided to all relevant stakeholders until the complaints is closed. DSS Feedback and Complaints Team (FCT) will be provided with the outcome of the complaint's findings in Complaint Process Report, for review and final clearance.	

Complainant Information		Grant Recipient Details	
System ID (e.g., JSID, CRN etc) if applicable		Program Name	
Name		Grant Recipient	
Email		Location / State	
Contact Number		Did complainant contact provider about complaint?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes
Language other			
<b>Describe the Complaint</b>			
Complainants desired outcome			
Any special requirements / Third party involvement			
<b>Supporting Documents attached</b>			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
<b>Actionable Items of key issues</b>			
Service Assurance Officer to list key issues that are in scope for complaint			
<b>Consent and Authorisation</b>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Complainant consent to investigate actionable items and contact relevant third parties			
<input type="checkbox"/> Permission obtained to share complainant details with Funding Recipient			
Date of Consent	Click or tap to enter a date.		





## CORPORATE POLICIES Complaints

- Corporate Policy List
- Complaints**
- Forms

If you receive a Complaint, Enquiry or Compliment from a member of the public you need to let us know. DSS encourages clients to provide feedback on their experiences with DSS or DSS funded service providers so that we can continue to improve the services we offer to the Australian community. Any feedback received through this channel will be provided to the relevant DSS area for appropriate action.

### Contact

<p><b>Internal to the Department</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DSS Enterprise Compliance and Feedback Director <b>s22</b></li> <li>DSS Feedback Team Lead <b>s22</b></li> <li>DSS Feedback Team <b>s22</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>External to the Department</b></p> <p>Ph: 1800 634 035          Fax: (02) 6133 8442          Email: <a href="mailto:complaints@dss.gov.au">complaints@dss.gov.au</a>          Post: DSS Enterprise Compliance and Feedback team          GPO Box 9820          Canberra ACT 2601</p>
--	--

### Complaints

DSS has a formal process for the handling of all complaints it receives about DSS program and DSS funded service providers. If you receive a complaint, please forward it to the DSS Feedback and Coordination team.

- [About Complaints](#)
- [Complaints Management Policy](#)
- [DSS Feedback Coordination Guidelines](#)

### Reporting

Compliments, suggestions and enquiries can be sent to the DSS Feedback team.

Email: [complaints@dss.gov.au](mailto:complaints@dss.gov.au)

### Commonwealth Ombudsman

The department may receive requests from the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office in regards to a complaint about an action or decision made by the department or about a service provider funded by the department.

- [About Commonwealth Ombudsman](#)

### Compliments and Enquiries

Compliments, suggestions and enquiries can be sent to the DSS Feedback team.

Email: [complaints@dss.gov.au](mailto:complaints@dss.gov.au)

- ### More Information
- [Enterprise Compliance and Feedback Section](#)
  - [Complaints Management Policy](#)

Browser address bar: <https://www.dss.gov.au/contact/feedback-com> | Complaints | DSS Feedback and Complai...

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**Australian Government**  
**Department of Social Services**

**Contact DSS**

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## DSS Feedback and Complaints

Where can you provide feedback or a complaint to the Department of Social Services (DSS)

DSS encourages all clients to provide feedback. Making a complaint, giving a compliment or offering a suggestion can help DSS improve its services.

If you have an enquiry or complaint about an issue that relates to another [Department or Agency](#), we suggest you contact that agency in the first instance. Contact details are below.

### Services available to assist you to make a complaint, compliment, enquiry or provide feedback

- Hearing and /or Speech impairments:** If you have a hearing or speech impairment, you can use the [National Relay Service](#) to contact any of DSS's listed phone numbers.
- Languages other than English:** If you need an interpreter call the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) on 131 450. TIS National will put you through to any of DSS's listed phone numbers.
- Speak and listen:** Speak and Listen users phone 1300 555 727 then ask for 1300 362 072

**Contact the Department**

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- DSS Feedback and Complaints**
- Reporting Suspected Fraud
- National Relay Service
- Freedom of Information
- Information Publication Scheme
- Media Enquiries

**Contacts to other Complaint Handling Agencies** | **Compliment, Feedback or Enquiry** | **Complaint**

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## Contacts page

Listen ▶

General complaints about DSS programs or DSS funded service providers are dealt with under the [DSS Complaints Management](#) process. However, if your complaint relates to a program or service funded by another agency or department, the table below may assist you in getting to the right area to submit your complaint. It is best to lodge your complaint with these areas directly in the first instance, as DSS may not be able to help you.

Complaint Relates to:	Contact Information	Name of Department / Website
The assessment or delivery of a service provided by Department of Human Services or a service provider.  For example, Payment of benefits, Centrelink, Social Security, Pensions	Phone regarding Feedback and Complaints 1800 132 468 <a href="https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/complaints-and-feedback/">https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/complaints-and-feedback/</a>	<a href="#">Department of Human Services</a> (DHS)
Ageing and Aged Care	Phone Switchboard: 02 6289 1555 Phone Freecall 1800 020 103 <a href="http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-central.htm">http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-central.htm</a>	<a href="#">Department of Health</a>
Child Care	Phone Switchboard: 1300 566 046 <a href="https://www.education.gov.au/feedback-and-enquiry-form">https://www.education.gov.au/feedback-and-enquiry-form</a>	<a href="#">Department of Education</a>
visa, citizenship, travel or trade, including bringing goods in and out of Australia	To make an enquiry: Phone Switchboard: 131 881 <a href="http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about/contact/make-enquiry">http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about/contact/make-enquiry</a> To provide Feedback: Phone Switchboard: 133 177 <a href="http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about/contact/provide-feedback">http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about/contact/provide-feedback</a>	<a href="#">Department of Home Affairs - Compliments, complaints and suggestions</a>  <a href="#">Department of Home Affairs - Compliments - General enquiries form</a>
Employment Services, Job seekers, for example jobactive, Transition to Work, Work for the Dole	Phone Switchboard: 1800 805 260 <a href="https://www.jobs.gov.au/contact-department">https://www.jobs.gov.au/contact-department</a>	<a href="#">Department of Jobs and Small Business</a>
Policy queries regarding Domestic Policy, National Security and International Policy, Indigenous affairs and Communication with a Minister	Phone Switchboard: 02 6271 5111 <a href="https://www.dpmc.gov.au/contact-us">https://www.dpmc.gov.au/contact-us</a> To email a complaint: <a href="mailto:complaints@pmc.gov.au">complaints@pmc.gov.au</a>	<a href="#">Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet</a>
Employee/Employer disputes	Phone Switchboard: 1300 799 675 <a href="https://www.fwc.gov.au/about-us/contact-us/complaints-feedback">https://www.fwc.gov.au/about-us/contact-us/complaints-feedback</a>	<a href="#">Fair Work Commission</a>



## Contact DSS

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## Compliment, Feedback and Enquiry Page

Listen

DSS aims to provide consistent and quality services to the Australian community through our staff and service providers. If you have a compliment, suggestion or enquiry about a DSS program or a DSS funded service provider or would like to make a suggestion about how we could improve our services we would like to hear from you.

DSS encourages all clients to provide feedback on their experiences with DSS or a DSS funded service provider.

- [Online Feedback, Enquiry or Compliment Form](#)
- **Email:** [complaints@dss.gov.au](mailto:complaints@dss.gov.au)
- **Telephone:** 1800 834 035
- **Post:** DSS Feedback, GPO Box 9820, Canberra, ACT, 2801

Last updated: 22 November 2018 - 3:40pm

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## Complaints Page



DSS encourages all clients to provide feedback on their experiences with DSS or a DSS funded service provider. The complaints management process ensures that any concerns you have with the services or decisions of DSS or a DSS-funded service provider are taken seriously and dealt with promptly. Your concerns can help us to improve our processes.

DSS will treat your concerns as a priority, managing your complaint with integrity and fairness, and keeping you informed while working with you towards a satisfactory resolution.

### Lodging a complaint

- [Advice on lodging a Complaint](#)
- [What your Complaint maybe about](#)
- [Contacting the DSS Complaints Line](#)
- [Making a complaint](#)
- [Information we will require and confidentiality](#)
- [What you can do if you are not satisfied with the Departments response](#)

### Advice on lodging a complaint

- It is important that you remain calm and focus on the main problem. Think of what you want to complain about and what you think should be done to fix it.
- Telephoning in a complaint can be easier and quicker; however you won't always be able to speak to the person directly responsible in responding to your complaint. If you complaint is complex then send an email via [complaints@dss.gov.au](mailto:complaints@dss.gov.au) or a letter via DSS Feedback, GPO Box 9820, Canberra ACT, 2801 would be the preferred option.
- Include in your complaint the main facts, in a logical order – your contact information, relevant dates and times, description of the complaint and attach relevant documentation.
- Identify what outcome you would like from lodging the complaint. Make sure your outcome is not unreasonable.
- Keep records of all correspondence sent and received.

### What your complaint may be about

The Complaints Management process looks into complaints from the public about DSS's service(s), or the service of a DSS funded service provider. These complaints may be about:

- unreasonable delay;
- inadequate service, explanation or reasons;
- legal error;
- factual error in decision making process;
- human error;
- procedural deficiency;
- discriminatory action or decision;
- flawed administrative process; or

- fraud and compliance issues

## Contacting the DSS complaints line

We recommend that you try to resolve the matter with the relevant organisation before contacting the DSS complaints line. General complaints are dealt with under the DSS Complaints Management process, please find below the details to contact the DSS Complaints line:

- Telephone: 1800 634 035
- Fax: (02) 6133 8442
- Email: [complaints@dss.gov.au](mailto:complaints@dss.gov.au)
- Mail: DSS Feedback, GPO Box 9820, Canberra ACT, 2601
- [Online Complaints Form](#)

**Please Note:** Calls made to the 1800 634 035 number will be recorded to assist in the effective management of the complaint as well as for training purposes. Please advise the complaints officer if you do not wish to have your call recorded

## Making a Complaint

The team member will:

- Discuss your concerns with you.
- Advise you that the DSS complaints line facilitates your complaint being assigned to the right area within DSS and will keep you informed of progress
- Register your complaint.

A written response will be provided to you within 28 days. If the issue is complex we may need to extend that time. We will advise you if this is the case.

## Information we will require and confidentiality

To look into a complaint we require:

- Details of your complaint.
- Details of any attempts you have made to resolve the matter.

We will accept anonymous complaints but the following optional information will help us to look into your concerns more effectively:

- Your name and contact details.
- Permission for the DSS officer/s looking into the matter to disclose your personal information to the relevant parties (if applicable).
- Permission for the relevant parties to provide details of your dealings with them to the DSS officer/s looking into the matter (if applicable).

DSS staff will seek your consent before disclosing/requesting any of your personal information.

If you agree, your personal information will be used for the purposes of processing your complaint and will be protected under the provisions of the *Privacy Act 1988* and in accordance with the Australian Privacy Principles. Your personal information will not be released to any person or organisation unless required by law or you provide your consent.

- [Consent form \(PDF 46 KB\)](#)
- Online consent can be submitted when completing the [Online Complaints or Feedback, Enquiry or Compliments Form](#)

You have the right to withdraw your personal information from the Complaints Management process at any time.

The DSS privacy policy contains information about how you can access and correct personal information held by DSS about you. It also contains information about how you can complain about a breach of the Australian Privacy Principles and how DSS will deal with such a complaint. The [DSS privacy policy](#) can be found on our website on the [Privacy Policy page](#).

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## What you can do if you are not satisfied with the Departments response

If you are not satisfied with the way in which your concerns have been handled you can complain to the [Commonwealth Ombudsman](#). Complaints to the Ombudsman can be made in writing, by phone, in person or by using an online complaint form.

- Ph: 1300 362 072
- Email: [ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au](mailto:ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au)
- Post: GPO Box 442, CANBERRA ACT 2601

Last updated: 23 November 2018 3:07pm



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## Feedback Form



### Enquiry, Feedback, Compliment Or Complaint

Please choose from the options below: *(required)*

- Enquiry
- Feedback
- Compliment
- Complaint

### Before lodging a complaint

If your complaint relates to an organisation funded by DSS we strongly recommend that you try to resolve the matter before you contact us.

Have you approached the service provider about this complaint?

- None -

### My Details

Title

- None -

Your Name *(required)*

Please enter your name as First Middle Last

State/Territory *(required)*

- Select -

Email address

Do you have any special requirements we need to be aware of in order to manage your request?

– Address Details

Preferred Contact Method *(required)*

- Email
- Mail
- Home phone
- Mobile phone
- Work Phone

– Complaint Details

Please provide details of your complaint, including who provided the service.

Please enter the details of the organisation or person you wish to complain about. (Include the name, address and contact details if known)

Use the space below to provide a short summary of your complaint. It is useful to include what happened, when it happened and who was involved. If you need more space, please attach separate documents below or send an email to [complaints@dss.gov.au](mailto:complaints@dss.gov.au). *(required)*

The main key concerns/issues I want looked into are:

Issue #1 (No more than 100 words).

Issue #2 (No more than 100 words).

Issue #3 (No more than 100 words).

If you would like to submit more details about your complaint and the issue of concern, you can upload more information below.



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Social Services**

Name

Address

Dear ,

Thank you for your email/letter/call of INSERT DATE where you raised concerns about....

Our records show that the Department looked into this matter in INSERT DATE. The result was XXXXX

Therefore, the Department now considers this complaint to be closed.

If you are not satisfied with the Department's handling of your complaint you are able to take this matter to the Commonwealth Ombudsman who can be contacted on 1300 362 072.

Yours Sincerely,

**NAME**

Feedback Coordination Team

Ph: 1800 634 035

Fax: (02) 6133 8442

Email: [complaints@dss.gov.au](mailto:complaints@dss.gov.au)

Post: Complaints, PO Box 7576, Canberra Business Centre, ACT 2610

DATE

Our Reference:

s22

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**Subject:** CoE - Seeking Advice

Good Afternoon

Can you please advise if the attached email is something that the department can look into. Please do not action anything at this point as Privacy Consent has not been received.

Please contact us via the Complaints mailbox [complaints@dss.gov.au](mailto:complaints@dss.gov.au) if you wish to discuss this further or have any issues regarding the complaint.

Kind Regards

s22

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Dear Centre of Expertise,

The DSS Feedback Coordination Team (FCT) has received a complaint from XXX regarding XXX.

Privacy consent from the complainant has been received and is attached for your records / has been received over the phone on --/--/----.

Please also find attached the Complaint Recording Template, which contains the agreed key concerns that are to be looked into.

I have also included additional emails from the complainant that provides background information for your reference.

The response is to be sent back to the FCT by Day, 00 Month 2018.

Please contact us via the Complaints mailbox [complaints@dss.gov.au](mailto:complaints@dss.gov.au) if you wish to discuss this further or have any issues regarding the complaint.

Kind Regards

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s22

**Enterprise Compliance and Feedback**  
Assurance and Performance Branch, Chief Counsel Group  
Department of Social Services

s22

DSS acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to elders both past and present.

s22



Good morning/afternoon

This email is to advise you that your complaint regarding XXX is currently under review.

The Department takes all complaints seriously and I am currently assessing the concerns you have raised. I will provide you with a further update as soon as possible.

If you wish to discuss the progress of this matter, please feel free to contact me on the number listed below.

Kind regards,

s22

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Good Afternoon,

Thank you for the email of 22 June 2018 regarding your Service Provider \*\*\*\*\*.

As the matter relates to your job provider, you should direct your enquiries to the National Customer Service Line (NCSL).

For your information, the contact details for NCSL are provided below.

**Phone:** 1800 805 206

**Email:** [nationalcustomerserviceline@employment.gov.au](mailto:nationalcustomerserviceline@employment.gov.au)

I hope this information has been of assistance to you.

**Ethan**

Feedback Coordination Team

Ph: 1800 634 035

Fax: (02) 6133 8442

Email: [complaints@dss.gov.au](mailto:complaints@dss.gov.au)

Post: Feedback, PO Box 9820, Canberra Business Centre, ACT 2610

s22

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Good Morning/Afternoon

Please see the below email from XXXX regarding XXXX. This was received on the xxxx. Complaints reference number xxxx. Please confirm back to this email with the PDMS number for our reference.

Can you please ensure that when the response is provided to the complainant that the complaints team are bcc'd into the response.

If you have any queries please let us know.

Kind Regards

s22

Feedback Coordination Team

Ph: 1800 634 035

Fax: (02) 6133 8442

Email: [complaints@dss.gov.au](mailto:complaints@dss.gov.au)

Post: Feedback, PO Box 9820, Canberra Business Centre, ACT 2610



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Social Services**

Name  
Address

Dear XXX,

Thank you for your phone call of 1 March 2018 where you raised concerns about the BSWAT Team within the Department of Social Services.

I have identified the following key concern from your phone call/email which the Department will look into:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

If you believe that I have not accurately reflected your concerns, please contact me on the number below as soon as possible.

I have attached a privacy consent form and I ask that you please sign and return the form using the contact details below. Alternatively, you may choose to remain anonymous; however it is important to note that without your consent it will be difficult for the Department to comprehensively address your concerns.

Once we receive either the privacy consent form or advice that you wish to remain anonymous, the matter will be allocated to the appropriate area for action. As such, you should be aware that you may be contacted by another DSS staff member seeking additional information.

We will endeavour to provide a final written response to your concerns within 28 days of receiving your signed consent form. We will treat all information about you confidentially in accordance with the Commonwealth policy provisions and laws.

If you wish to discuss the progress of this matter, please feel free to contact me on the details listed below.

Yours Sincerely,

**Complaints Officers Name**

DSS Feedback Coordination Team

Ph: 1800 634 035

Fax: (02) 6133 8442

Email: [complaints@DSS.gov.au](mailto:complaints@DSS.gov.au)

Post: DSS Complaints, PO Box 9820, Canberra Business Centre, ACT 2610

DATE: xx/xx/xxxx

Our Reference: 2019/xxxx

s22

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Good Morning/Afternoon,

Thank you for the email of xxxx regarding Aged Care.

Unfortunately, your enquiry is not something that the Department of Social Services can assist with. As the matter relates to the Department of Health, you should direct your enquiries to the information line on 1800 020 103.

Alternatively, you can email the Department of Health at  
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-comments.htm>

Regards

**Ethan**

Feedback Coordination Team

Ph: 1800 634 035

Fax: (02) 6133 8442

Email: [complaints@dss.gov.au](mailto:complaints@dss.gov.au)

Post: Feedback, PO Box 7576, Canberra Business Centre, ACT 2610

