

EVIDENCE CENTRE
TE POKAPŪ TAUNAKITANGA

FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS SYSTEMS

A Rapid Review

Published October 2018



**ORANGA
TAMARIKI**
Ministry for Children

EVIDENCE CENTRE

TE POKAPŪ TAUNAKITANGA

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The Oranga Tamariki Evidence Team works to build the evidence base that helps us better understand wellbeing and what works to improve outcomes for New Zealand's children, young people, and their whānau.

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Published: October 2018

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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Evidence Centre and Oranga Tamariki peer reviewers for their comments on early drafts.

ISBN: 978-0-9951060-8-6

If you need this material in a different version, please email us at research@ot.govt.nz and we will provide it for you.

Citation guidance:

This report can be referenced as Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre. (2018). *Feedback and complaints systems: A rapid review*. Wellington, New Zealand: Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This rapid review looks at the components of an effective complaints system to inform the design and delivery of a feedback and complaints system for Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children. An effective complaints system can resolve issues, lead to improvements in service delivery, and improve the reputation of an organisation. However, children and young people face a number of barriers to giving feedback or making complaints.

This rapid review outlines key principles and components of complaints systems before giving recommendations for improving awareness and accessibility, responsiveness, quality assurance, and learning from complaints systems. This review is a time-limited examination that draws on a limited research base. Rather than providing any evidence of an optimum approach, this review is limited to providing a general description of feedback and complaint systems.

Human rights principles and complaints systems

- Four key UNCRC articles form the basis for children and young people’s rights. These relate to non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, respect for the views of the child, and the right to good quality health care.
- Good practice principles for complaints systems relate to enabling complaints, responding to complaints, and ensuring accountability and learning.
- Complaints systems should be as simple and straightforward as possible, supported by legislation, be client focused, and designed as positive (not adversarial) feedback cycles.

Encouraging children and young people’s voices

- A child friendly system:
 - has information on rights and the complaints system process in an accessible form
 - allows for children and young people’s wishes regarding what they would like to give feedback or complain about
 - has processes that support access, such as access to a range of forms and supportive interactions with staff.
- An advocacy service is an important auxiliary of accessible feedback and complaints processes.
- An effective system needs to provide for a range of vulnerable groups, including Māori tamariki and rangatahi.

Complaints system responsiveness

- Meaningful participation includes both the opportunity for children and young people to express views and the inclusion of their views in decision-making.
- Systems need to meet clear and reasonable time limits. The feedback and complaints processes also need to be transparent and clearly explained to children and young people.
- Staff understanding and practice of confidentiality is crucial.
- Training needs to equip staff to treat complainants with sensitivity, respect and courtesy, as well as to support children and young people to access feedback and complaints systems.

Accountability, quality assurance, and learning

- A quality assurance function requires clear performance standards and must collect data relating to complainants, the contents of complaints, and the complaints process.
- The formal complaints process will only capture a fraction of the concerns or issues in a system. Both informal and formal complaints need to be recorded to support consistent responses, continuous learning, and monitor quality.
- A quality assurance process should include both periodic and annual reporting, that is fair and transparent.

FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS

Background

An effective complaints system can resolve issues, lead to improvements in service delivery, and improve the reputation of an organisation

The International Standards Organization (ISO) defines a complaint as an “expression of dissatisfaction made to an organization, related to its products, or the complaints-handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected” (ISO, 2014, p.6). A complaints system is the mechanism through which individuals or groups are able to “address complaints related to a particular institution or organisation and through which it is ensured these complaints are properly reviewed and responded to” (Transparency International, 2016, p.2). This can include agency policies, procedures, practices and technology (Victorian Ombudsman, 2007).¹

An effective complaint handling system is fundamental to the provision of quality service and can provide three key benefits to an organisation:

1. it resolves issues raised by a person who is dissatisfied in a timely and cost-effective way;
2. it provides information that can lead to improvements in service delivery; and
3. where complaints are handled properly, a good system can improve the reputation of an organisation and strengthen public confidence in an organisation’s administrative processes (Child, Youth and Family [CYF], 2013, see also ISO, 2014).

Problems have been highlighted with the existing CYF complaints system

Children and young people involved with Oranga Tamariki–Ministry for Children are a particularly vulnerable group. They often face challenges participating fully in decision-making processes, and have particular difficulties voicing concerns or making complaints because of their age and circumstances. The development of an effective complaints system is one way of ensuring children and young people’s views are considered in a meaningful and practical way (Office of the Children’s Commissioner [OCC], 2012). However, problems have been highlighted with the existing CYF complaints system,² including that it is overly complex, lacks a culture of accountability and learning, lacks children’s voices, and has variable capability and capacity to effectively respond to complaints or improve upon outcomes as a result. Earlier reports on the CYF complaints system noted the significant challenges involved in its provision and the high levels of dissatisfaction as well as a number of opportunities for improvement in policy and practice (Broad, 2013; OCC, 2012).

¹ This evidence brief refers to the more commonly used ‘complaints system’ rather than ‘feedback and complaints system.’ While complaints refer to ‘dissatisfaction’, feedback may be neutral, positive or negative (or a combination) and is usually construed in terms of providing comment rather than criticism. Both feedback and complains can be used as a basis for improvement.

² This evidence brief was produced in November 2016, prior to the establishment of Oranga Tamariki – The Ministry for Children on 1 April 2017. As a result, there are references to CYF throughout.

This review looks at features of effective feedback and complaints systems

This rapid review looks at the development and operation of an effective complaints system to assist with and inform the design and delivery of a feedback and complaints system for Oranga Tamariki. This includes outlining key principles and components of complaints systems before giving recommendations for improving awareness and accessibility, responsiveness, quality assurance, and learning from complaints systems.

Human rights principles

Human rights principles form the basis for children and young people's rights as complainants

The New Zealand Office of the Ombudsman notes that "people have a right to make comments or raise concerns and expect them to be heard by the agency they have been dealing with" (Office of the Ombudsman, 2012, p.3). Human rights principles set out in domestic and international law form a basis for complaints systems. For children these rights are enshrined in the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989. They are also set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). New Zealand is a signatory to UNCRC and is obligated to fulfil the promises it makes to every child under the age of 18 years.

For the purposes of child welfare (and complaints systems) there are several key UNCRC articles against which children's agencies are held to account:

- Article 2 (non-discrimination): The Convention applies to every child regardless of their ethnicity, gender, religion, abilities, whatever they think or say, no matter what type of family they come from.
- Article 3 (best interests of the child): The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all actions concerning children.
- Article 12 (respect for the views of the child): When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account.
- Article 13 (freedom of expression): Children have the right to get and share information, as long as the information is not damaging to them or others.
- Article 24 (health and health services): Children have the right to good quality health care – the best health care possible.³

Eight generally accepted human rights principles for complaints mechanisms include:

1. The right of the child to respect for his or her dignity at all times.
2. The child's right to privacy and to participation in meetings or interviews in a secure and reassuring environment.
3. The best interests of the child as a primary concern.
4. The child's right to protection from discrimination and to be treated in accordance with the principle of equality.

³ UNCRC general comments also provide illustrative information on the rights of children to access complaints systems. See for example General Comment No. 5 (2003).

5. Respect for the child's views in addressing the complaint.
6. The child's right to be promptly provided with necessary information in an accessible language, including possible options and consequences of the complaint, procedures involved, and available protective measures and support services.
7. Provision of appropriate professional or paraprofessional support to the child, including in overcoming the adverse physical, psychological and social consequences of the incident addressed by the complaint.
8. Decisions should be as expeditious as possible (Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary on Violence against Children, 2012).

Internationally, a range of bodies are empowered to receive and hear complaints from children and young people based on these principles

Where there is dissatisfaction with services or more egregious breaches of human rights, a variety of national administrative and judicial bodies are empowered to receive and hear complaints from children and young people. This includes independent human rights institutions, commissioners, and ombudspersons for children and young people. In some countries the right to seek remedy through different bodies is differentiated by age and limited in some way (Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary on Violence against Children, 2012).

Complaints systems

Effective complaints systems rest on good complaints practice principles

Effective complaints systems are also established on the basis of good practice principles. The Ombudsman Western Australia lists ten aspects related to good practice complaints systems, which can be clustered under three broader themes:

Enabling complaints

1. Client focused: The organisation is committed to effective complaint handling and values feedback through complaints.
2. Visibility: Information about how and where to complain is well publicised to customers, staff and other interested parties.
3. Accessibility: The process of making a complaint and investigating it is easy for complainants to access and understand.

Responding to complaints

4. Responsiveness: Complaints are acknowledged in a timely manner, addressed promptly and according to order of urgency, and the complainant is kept informed throughout the process.
5. Objectivity and fairness: Complaints are dealt with in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner. This will help to ensure that the complaint handling process is fair and reasonable. Unreasonable complainant conduct is not allowed to become a burden.
6. Confidentiality: Personal information related to complaints is kept confidential.
7. Remedy: If a complaint is upheld, the organisation provides a remedy.
8. Review: There are opportunities for internal and external review and/or appeal about the organisation's response to the complaint, and the complainants are informed about these avenues.

Accountability and learning

9. Accountability: Accountabilities for complaint handling are clearly established, and complaints and responses to them are monitored and reported to management and other stakeholders.
10. Continuous Improvement: Complaints are a source of improvement for organisations (Ombudsman Western Australia, 2016).⁴

Complaints systems are designed to be as simple and straightforward as possible

In a review of complaints systems in health and social care in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, New Zealand and The Netherlands a key theme that emerged was that systems are often designed to be as simple as straightforward as possible (Lister et al., 2008).

Complaints should be resolved quickly and locally if possible, and avoid hand-off between agencies, in order to meet the expectations of service users and the public. To this end, larger countries decentralised complaints support to regional levels. Regulations were intended to establish a clear and simple process for complainants regardless of the complaint or outcome. However, coordination of complaints across services is sometimes difficult. Too many layers of review and lay panels can also lead to unacceptable delays in complaint handling without necessarily leading to complaint resolution (Lister et al., 2008).

One suggested framework for a complaints system in England, conforming to the suggestion of keeping things simple and straightforward, with as few layers as possible, takes the following structure:

- informal local resolution within the immediate team
- formal resolution at the senior management level of the organisation
- either independent review conducted at area/regional level reporting to an oversight body, or appeal to a relevant ombudsman service, which includes
 - assessment of the complaint to accept or reject the referral
 - review and decision, or
 - investigation and decision (Lister et al., 2008).

Complaints and feedback systems need to operate as positive feedback cycles

A number of good practice principles overseas concentrate on having a feedback and complaints system that is client service focused, is both accessible and visible, and demonstrates a clear commitment from an organisations management. The Department of Education and Skills in England argue that a complaints system should be seen as part of a positive feedback cycle that can inform and improve service delivery, and not a negative process which assigns blame. Agencies should “develop a listening and learning culture where learning is fed back to children and young people who use services” (Butler, 2013, p.3). The process also needs to be a positive service for children that supports their rights (OCC, 2012).

⁴ See Appendix 1 for another example of feedback and complaints principles.

Complaints systems must address a number of practical issues in order to be effective for children and young people

The international literature notes that making a complaint and navigating through complaints systems is rarely straightforward. Complainants are frequently not offered help or support through the complaints process with most respondents to complaints service surveys indicating they found the process difficult. As one report noted, pursuing a complaint requires “personal investment of considerable time, determination and resilience on the part of the complainant” (National Audit Office, 2008, p.8).

Key barriers for children and young people relate to:

- widespread information gaps, for example, about children and young people’s rights to complain and about confidentiality and about whom children and young people should talk to if they wish to complain
- the often complex and lengthy systems many services have in place
- the training of staff in mental health, sexual health, and GP services so that they are able to receive and handle complaints made by children and young people
- the need for complaints systems to be independent of the provider service if they are to be seen as credible and to be trusted by those wishing to make a complaint
- the patchy availability of advocacy and other sources of support for children and young people wishing to complain
- the inadequacy of complaints monitoring and evaluation processes, which have a specific focus on children and young people (Street et al., 2012).

Encouraging children and young people’s voices

Children and young people need to understand their rights and the complaints system process

A lack of knowledge about their rights or the complaints system can prevent children and young people from being willing to make a complaint. This issue has been described in a number of reviews of complaints processes, such as in Wales (Pithouse & Crowley, 2007), in Scotland (Bell, 2008), and in New Zealand (OCC, 2012).

Information that is provided to children and young people should outline:

- how to complain
- what information is required when they complain
- what assistance is available to them if they wish to make a complaint (e.g. advocacy)
- how the complaint will be managed (timeframes, progress reports, final advice)
- where the complainants can access the agency’s complaints management policy and procedure (OCC, 2012).

Information on rights and the complaints procedure needs to be provided in an accessible form

To reach young people, information needs to be accessible, meaning relevant, in a familiar form, and not over-whelming in length. Traditional ways of communicating – brochures and web postings – may not be sufficient (Office of the Representative for Children and Youth & Office of the Ombudsmen, 2010; Pithouse & Crowley, 2007).

Interviews with children and young people involved with CYF or in care have generated a number of recommendations for supporting the understanding of both rights and complaints system procedures.

Access to information that is child-friendly should include:

- information that is simple and easy to read, and include diagrams or pictures
- use of multi-media, including websites, booklets, newsletters, Facebook, and texting
- multiple sources, including caregivers, social workers, and schools
- capacity for a regular one-on-one discussion with an adult who can explain their rights and the system, such as their social worker or an independent, confidential individual(OCC, 2012).

A child-centred system needs to take into account children and young person's views on what they would like to give feedback or complain about

When designing a complaints system, it is important to consider the needs of the user as well as the system. The literature suggests a disconnect between what adults believe is a 'complaint' compared to what children and young people would like to complain or provide feedback about. While children and young people report wanting to complain about 'anything,' complaints systems are generally limited to particular services, and with those, a number of exclusions apply (Bell, 2008; Bessell, 2011; OCC, 2012). There is value in speaking to children and young people about what they would like to complain about, so that the agency can build in capacity to ensure children and young people can access the relevant systems and procedures (see Clwyd & Hart, 2013).

The process of providing feedback or laying a complaint needs to be child-friendly and user-friendly

The process of giving feedback or laying a complaint should also be child-friendly and user friendly; actively listening and understanding people, and respecting complainants and their views (Office of the Ombudsman, 2012).

The literature suggests that making the complaints process child-friendly includes ensuring:

- the agency can receive complaints in a variety of forms, such as multi-media, email, text, phone, or in person
- children can access complaint information from multiple sources. For example paper forms could be provided at each contact with a social worker or advocate
- complaints channels, including hotlines, need to be free, reliable and always generate a response
- children and young people are aware of and able to access a support person. As children and young people often report wanting support from their friends, the agency needs to be able to facilitate this
- adults who receive complaints from children or young people must be respectful, understanding, willing to listen, adhere to confidentiality principles, and willing/able to take action where necessary (OCC, 2012; Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia, 2013).

Friends, family, a trusted adult, or a social worker should be available to support children and young people in care through a feedback and complaints process

Children and young people in care may face additional barriers to having their voices heard, due to a lack of a trusted individual who can support them (see OCC, 2012; Fitzmaurice, 2016). A number of

United Kingdom studies have replicated the finding that children and young people want to work with individuals they trust (Bell, 2008). Friends and family are often a young person's first choice for support; however, access to these supports may be hampered for children and young people in care or in contact with CYF. Access to a trusted adult will also be difficult as these children and young people may have experienced maltreatment by adults responsible for their care, or have no stable, trusted adult who can support them. The relationship between a child or young person and their social worker is also critical to their voice being heard, but can be complicated by high staff turnover or a lack of resourcing, and the power imbalance.

An advocacy service is an important part of an accessible feedback and complaints processes

A crucial avenue of support for children and young people's voices being meaningfully heard is an independent advocate. A key aspect of advocacy is "about ensuring that children and young people can express their views and that these views are heard and taken into account by those who are involved in decision making about children and young people's lives" (Elsley, 2010, p.5).

Individual advocacy services can support access to complaints systems as well as help redress the power imbalance between young people and adults through:

- providing a support person, although for the advocate to be trusted and known this requires confidentiality, time for relationship building and multiple visits
- being independent, so that they can advocate for a child or young person with no conflict of interest
- focusing on the child or young person's views and wishes rather than acting from an adults point of view as to what is 'in their best interests.'

An advocacy service needs to support and not determine the accessibility of a feedback and complaints system

While it is important that an advocacy service is available, having an advocate should not be a requirement for children and young people giving feedback or making a complaint. The agency needs to ensure that the process is easy for children and young people to access on their own. Otherwise, a dependency on advocates for access to the system will exacerbate the existing power imbalance between children and adults. Interviews with children and young people have suggested this is already an issue in New Zealand. In the review of the CYF complaints process "A large majority of the children felt that their complaint would not be taken seriously unless they were supported by an adult" (OCC, 2012, p.21).

An effective feedback and complaints system needs to identify and provide for vulnerable groups

The literature suggests that there are a number of groups who can be especially vulnerable and who need to be supported to provide feedback or complaints (OCC, 2012; Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary on Violence against Children, 2012).

These include children and young people who are:

- living at home
- living in a rural area
- living with disabilities
- homeless
- members of minority ethnic groups
- refugees or migrants.

The ability of the system to support each of these groups needs to be considered for each of the core components of the complaints system, such as access and feedback. This is particularly important for Māori children and young people, given their over-representation in the care and protection and youth justice systems (Modernising Child, Youth and Family Expert Panel, 2015).

Complaints system responsiveness

Meaningful participation includes the opportunity for children and young people to express their views and the inclusion of their views in decision-making

A complaints system can support children and young people's views being heard in decision-making. However, gathering the views or 'voice' of a child or young person is only one element of meaningful participation.

Bessell (2011) describes the three key components as:

- A child or young person has sufficient and appropriate information to be able to take part in the decision-making process.
- A child or young person has the opportunity to express their views freely.
- The child or young person's views affect the decision.

Participation can also be considered passive or active, where a child or young person is simply consulted, or where a child or young person participates by their choice, based on informed consent, with the understanding and expectation that their opinion will make a difference in whatever decision being made (Bessell, 2011). If children and young people feel that their opinions are recorded as part of a process but have no real impact on decision-making, this can lead to disillusionment or frustration for complainants and ultimately a lack of feedback or complaints within the system as a whole (Office of the Representative for Children and Youth & Office of the Ombudsmen, 2010).

This issue may be due to different preconceptions about what 'listening' to children and young people means in practice. Interviews with social workers and young people in England suggest that social workers reported that 'listening' relates to an opportunity to demonstrate empathy and respect for young people. In contrast, young people perceive 'listening' to mean the opportunity to express their views and for their views to have a clear impact on decision-making (McLeod, 2006).

It is important that the feedback and complaints system can respond in a 'timely' way

A good complaints system ensures that children and young people have their representations dealt with quickly, and if at all possibly by people who deliver the service locally. The International Organization for Standardization (ISO, 2004, as cited in OCC, 2012) also states that complaints needs to meet clear and reasonable time limits, which are communicated to and able to be understood by children and young people, and takes into account children's perspectives on time.

Research suggests that compared to adults, children generally perceive the passage of time to be slower, therefore delays are perceived to be longer (Wittmann & Lehnhoff, 2005). In order to be child-friendly complaints systems timelines will need to be shorter for children and young people than for adults. Based on a comparison of international good practice, a suggested timeframe for complaints resolution should be straight away where possible, and within one week generally. Formal resolution should take no longer than five weeks, although further independent review may take longer depending on the complexity of the complaint, anywhere up to ten weeks, with appeals to an ombudsman even longer (Lister et al., 2008).

The complaints resolution process should be transparent and clearly explained to children and young people

Updates on progress may help address the perception of children and young people being powerless relative to adults (OCC, 2012; Lister et al., 2008). Children and young people should be regularly informed of the progress of a complaint and the reasons why a complaint has progressed to the next level. Similarly, when resolution decisions have been made they need to be clearly documented and explained to the child or young person in question (OCC, 2012). Apologies should be made where appropriate (Office of the Ombudsman, 2012).

Privacy and confidentiality are key components that support trust in a system

Staff understanding and practice of confidentiality is crucial, as concerns about a lack of confidentiality are often cited as a reason for why children and young people do not raise complaints or concerns (Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia, 2013). Complaints and information provided by complainants should be handled according to relevant privacy, legislation, and regulations. Procedures should also ensure complainant confidentiality, something that is particularly important in cases where the complaint is against a member of staff. However, confidentiality should not be used as an excuse to avoid dealing with a complaint.

Information gathered during the complaint process should only be:

- used in order to deal with and resolve the complaint or to address systemic issues arising from the complaint
- disclosed in a de-identified format when data is disclosed to the public
- shared with agency staff on a need to know basis (Victorian Ombudsman, 2007).

Staff training should support a positive feedback and complaints system

Staff should be educated on children's rights and how to best support them through the feedback and complaints process. Staff also need to be equipped to treat complainants with sensitivity, respect, and courtesy (Victorian Ombudsman, 2007). It is also important that staff respond to changing practice around gathering children and young people's views.

For example, Bell (2008) describes how the directive to listen and act on issues children reported was perceived as a threat to staff, who responded by making sure that multiple workers were generally present in order that two worker's views were available to contrast the view of a single young person.

Staff training also needs to address a number of other potential issues identified in the literature:

- Unreasonable expectations or biases that minimise the ability of children and young people to participate, based on their age, maturity, and perceived vulnerability (see Fitzmaurice, 2016).
- The manner and extent to which adults filter or translate children and young people's views, even if unintentional (Fitzmaurice, 2016; Sinclair, 2004).
- The lack of clarity surrounding practice for 'informal' or 'formal' complaints, as this decision determines the agency response to a concern. The literature suggests that this divide can be somewhat arbitrary (see Bell, 2008).
- Awareness of the role and nature of the advocacy service available otherwise the effectiveness of that service is undermined. Employees also need to know how to refer children and to respond to advocates appropriately (OCC, 2012).

Accountability, quality assurance, and learning

Clear performance standards are needed to ensure transparent scrutiny and accountability

Attention should be given to ensuring accountability. Accountability means making sure the complaints handling system is open to scrutiny by users and agency staff when appropriate, the responsible minister, and any reviewing bodies or ombudsman. In this respect there should be suitable reporting mechanisms, which are set against documented performance standards (Victorian Ombudsman, 2007).

Both informal and formal complaints need to be recorded to support consistent responses, continuous learning, and monitor quality

In CYF, 'informal' complaints are those that can be dealt with easily or quickly, while 'formal' complaints go through a complaints process. The classification of complaints as informal or formal is generally made at the local site level.

This decision has a number of implications for the complainant, as informal complaints:

- have variable responses – a phone call to a meeting, and complainants may not receive a letter
- do not generally result in any formal documentation
- may not be recorded, although sites are encouraged to enter all complaints made at a site level (Child, Youth and Family, 2010, as cited in Children's Commission, 2012, p.6).

CYF staff training acknowledges that identifying if a concern should be a formal complaint or not can be difficult (OCC, 2012). This is consistent with the literature that suggests categorising concerns as 'informal' or 'formal' can hamper children and young people's access to the complaints system due to a lack of clarity on the part of the relevant (adult) decision-maker (see Bell, 2008).

The extent to which 'informal complaints' do not adhere to key principles for complaints systems may need to be considered, in particular, the variable nature of responses and the lack of recording. In any area, a formal complaints process will only capture a fraction of the concerns or issues in a system (Bell, 2008). Therefore, 'informal' complaints also need to be recorded in order to identify and

learn from issues and trends, and allow the full range of procedures to undergo quality assurance processes.

There is precedent for concerns at this level to be documented in a health context (Clwyd & Hart, 2013). If a change to recording practices is made, investment in IT infrastructure may be required in order to minimise any increase in administrative workload for staff.

A quality assurance function requires collecting data relating to complainants, the contents of complaints, and the complaints process

Learning from the complaint resolution process requires that organisations track and report internally. The following table shows the range of data needs to be collected so that the agency can both monitor adherence to principles and procedures, as well as learn and improve the complaints process and the services in question (Bell, 2008; OCC, 2012; Office of the Representative for Children and Youth & Office of the Ombudsmen, 2010).

Table 1: Data collection relating to complaint systems

Data	Purpose
Demographic information about children and young people giving feedback or making complaints, such as age or ethnicity.	Inform the agency as to the accessibility of the process e.g. if there are no or few complaints from children or young people involved with youth justice, then this may suggest an accessibility issue.
The form of complaints, such as the total number of complaints, method used to lay complaint, geographical region the complaint originated, service arm which the complaint relates to.	Inform the agency as to the accessibility of the process, whether the available methods are used or useful
The content of complaints.	Tracking, monitoring and analysing complaint data can reveal systemic and recurring issues and trends.
Timeframes and process information such as decisions made, the rationale behind these decisions, and when actions were taken.	Allows the agency to track adherence to the timeliness standards (e.g. the number of days before a complaint is formally acknowledged) and the quality of decision-making.
The outcome of complaints, e.g. actions on the part of the agency, whether the complainant was satisfied, whether the complaint was escalated, whether a change was made to the complaints process or service delivery).	Allows the agency to assess the quantity and quality of complaint resolutions, and document actions taken to improve complaint policy and processes as well as overall service quality.

A quality assurance process should include both periodic and annual reporting, that is fair and transparent

Learning from the complaint resolution process requires that organisations track and report internally at periodic intervals and undertake more intensive annual reviews of the overall process (OCC, 2012). Reviews should include:

- regular, random audits of regional processes to assess adherence to established policy and processes
- annual reporting on aggregate data and actions taken to improve complaint policy and processes and overall service quality.

In order for a review process to be transparent, those reviewing the complaint should not be involved in the issue under complaint (Office of the Representative for Children and Youth & Office of the Ombudsmen, 2010).

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APPENDIX 1: Principles for feedback and complaints

Source: Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (2009)

Principle	Description
1. Getting it right	<p>Acting in accordance with the law and relevant guidance, and with regard for the rights of those concerned.</p> <p>Ensuring that those at the top of the public body provide leadership to support good complaint management and develop an organisational culture that values complaints.</p> <p>Having clear governance arrangements, which set out roles and responsibilities, and ensure lessons are learnt from complaints.</p> <p>Including complaint management as an integral part of service design.</p> <p>Ensuring that staff are equipped and empowered to act decisively to resolve complaints.</p> <p>Focusing on the outcomes for the complainant and the public body.</p> <p>Signposting to the next stage of the complaints procedure, in the right way and at the right time</p>
2. Being customer focused	<p>Having clear and simple procedures.</p> <p>Ensuring that complainants can easily access the service dealing with complaints, and informing them about advice and advocacy services where appropriate.</p> <p>Dealing with complainants promptly and sensitively, bearing in mind their individual circumstances.</p> <p>Listening to complainants to understand the complaint and the outcome they are seeking.</p> <p>Responding flexibly, including co-ordinating responses with any other bodies involved in the same complaint, where appropriate.</p>
3. Being open and accountable	<p>Publishing clear, accurate and complete information about how to complain, and how and when to take complaints further.</p> <p>Publishing service standards for handling complaints.</p> <p>Providing honest, evidence-based explanations and giving reasons for decisions.</p> <p>Keeping full and accurate records</p>
4. Acting fairly and proportionately	<p>Treating the complainant impartially, and without unlawful discrimination or prejudice.</p> <p>Ensuring that complaints are investigated thoroughly and fairly to establish the facts of the case.</p> <p>Ensuring that decisions are proportionate, appropriate and fair.</p> <p>Ensuring that complaints are reviewed by someone not involved in the events leading to the complaint.</p> <p>Acting fairly towards staff complained about as well as towards complainants.</p>
5. Putting things right	<p>Acknowledging mistakes and apologising where appropriate.</p> <p>Providing prompt, appropriate and proportionate remedies.</p> <p>Considering all the relevant factors of the case when offering remedies.</p> <p>Taking account of any injustice or hardship that results from pursuing the complaint as well as from the original dispute.</p>
6. Seeking continuous improvement	<p>Using all feedback and the lessons learnt from complaints to improve service design and delivery.</p> <p>Having systems in place to record, analyse and report on the learning from complaints.</p> <p>Regularly reviewing the lessons to be learnt from complaints.</p> <p>Where appropriate, telling the complainant about the lessons learnt and changes made to services, guidance or policy.</p>

