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Policy for handling comments and complaints

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1. Introduction

This document sets out The National Archives' policy for handling comments and complaints made about our services and facilities.

Listening to what our users have to say is essential to improving the quality of our services. We want to know when we do things well and what aspects of our service our users appreciate; but we also want to know when things go wrong or when users feel that our service can be improved. This gives us a chance to make things better and enhance the user experience of The National Archives.

We value your comments and complaints so that we can:

- keep doing things that please you and give credit to our staff
- know if things have gone wrong and put them right for you
- learn the lessons, and improve our services

2. Who does this policy apply to?

- 2.1** The policy applies to all those we serve or have dealings with, however regularly, including members of the public, commercial organisations and other government bodies. It also applies to contractors, suppliers and any other individual or organisation that has business with The National Archives.
- 2.2** The term user is employed in its widest sense within this policy to encompass people or organisations who use any of our services, whether visiting, writing, emailing, telephoning or accessing The National Archives' online services.
- 2.3** This policy excludes complaints made about Freedom of Information (Fol) access requests which are handled separately. For information and procedures relating to Fol requests, please see the following page: <http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/freedom-of-information/making-a-freedom-of-information-request/>

This policy also excludes complaints arising under the Re-Use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015. For information and procedures relating to the investigation of these this type of complaints, please see our complaints about re-use pages: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/re-using-public-sector-information/complaints-about-re-use/psi-complaints/>

This policy also excludes complaints made about The Gazette, which is managed by The National Archives under a concessionary contract with The Stationery Office. For information and procedures relating to the investigation of this type of complaint, please see our complaints procedure page: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints-procedure/>

This policy excludes complaints made that relate to matters of Law. That is complaints that relate to the legal framework under which The National Archives operates or service complaints that require complaint handlers to form an opinion on The National Archives' obligations under the law. These would be matters for a court to decide.

3. What is a complaint?

We define a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction with our service, no matter how expressed and whether justified or not, that requires a response or further action on the part of The National Archives.

4. Our principles

We aim to follow the principles of good practice described in the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's Principles of Good Complaint Handling (10 February 2009).

We try to make our processes:

- easy to access and understand
- clear and simple to use
- responsive to the reasonable needs of complainants
- prompt, with established time limits for action (see 6.2 below), and keeping people informed of progress, especially when investigations take longer than expected
- fair, with an opportunity for a full and impartial investigation
- proportionate to the matters complained about
- informative, by using lessons learnt from complaints to improve services and by reviewing the results of such changes.

Our pledges to you

When we respond to your complaints you can expect us to:

- take your concerns seriously
- give you the name of the member of staff responsible for dealing with the complaint at each stage of the procedure
- be factually correct
- deal with your complaint promptly
- avoid jargon

Policy for handling comments and complaints

- answer all your points of concern
- be flexible in the way that we communicate with you
- give the reasons for the decision reached on a complaint
- explain the next steps available if you are still dissatisfied and provide contact details (address, telephone and e-mail)

Users who make a complaint can be assured that they will not be subjected to discrimination or retaliation as a result of complaining.

Our complaints process will be:

- frank and open
- impartial, avoiding any bias in favour of any party.
- thorough, finding out the relevant facts, taking views from people involved on both sides of the complaint and verifying explanations where possible.
- equitable, treating people in similar circumstances in similar ways.

5. How to comment or complain

We welcome views on our service and will respond to comments and complaints, however presented, whether in person, in writing, by telephone, email or other channels (for example, social media such as Twitter).

We provide comments and complaints forms, which can be returned through our suggestion boxes, by post, by email or handed to any member of staff.

Our information leaflet “Putting things right” explains how to comment or complain about our services, and how we will respond.

The comments and complaints reporting facility on our website does not require users to have email facilities: <https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/contact-us/your-views/>

Further help can be obtained by contacting our Customer Service and Complaints Team (tel 0208 392 5363, email yourviews@nationalarchives.gov.uk or write to the Quality Manager, The National Archives, Kew, Surrey TW9 4DU) who will advise how complaints can be taken forward and explain our complaints procedure.

6. How The National Archives responds to Comments and complaints

6.1 Our aim is to resolve complaints as soon as we are aware of them, and this means that the member of staff who first deals with a complaint is responsible for:

either

resolving the problem personally, if it is within their area of responsibility, ensuring that complaints handling staff in the Customer Services and Complaints Team are kept fully informed for monitoring and recording purposes

or

where this is not possible, for passing the complaint to our complaints handling staff to take forward.

(Initial responsibility for investigating and responding to complaints will usually lie with the part of the organisation which is the subject of the complaint, but our Customer Service and Complaints Team monitors complaints handling across The National Archives to ensure that they are handled consistently well and maintains a central record of complaints. This team is responsible for providing data and information about complaints to The National Archives' Chief Executive and Executive Team.)

6.2 Procedures

A member of the Customer Service and Complaints Team will acknowledge receipt of your comment or complaint within three working days (the day the complaint is received being Day 0). They will usually respond to you in writing, sometimes to confirm information given in a telephone call but also to let you know who will deal with your complaint. This will usually be either the Customer Service and Complaints Team or the department about which you have complained. The complaints handling team will ask the relevant department(s) to assist them to look into matters and respond fully to your concerns. If they think that a meeting or a telephone call may help to resolve your complaint, they will offer that option.

A full response will normally be sent to you within ten working days. The complaint response will explain how to take matters forward if you remain dissatisfied.

If your complaint requires us to implement another policy (such as a disciplinary policy) as part of the investigation, we will write to let you know that this is happening, and how long it is likely to take. In situations where the process is lengthy, we will keep you informed of progress at least once every four weeks. If you are dissatisfied with our response, you can, within two calendar months from the date of our final response to your complaint, ask for an independent internal review.

This will be carried out by the Chief Executive's Office, which reports directly to the Chief Executive. Staff in the Chief Executive's Office will contact you within five working days of receipt of your request. They will appoint a case reviewer and tell you who this is as soon as possible. The scope of the review will be agreed by you and the case reviewer. A draft report will usually be sent to you within 20 working days (the day the scope is agreed being Day 0). If the case reviewer is unable to complete the draft report within that time, they will explain the

Policy for handling comments and complaints

reasons why and tell you when you can expect a response. You will usually have ten working days to check the draft report for factual accuracy. The draft report will then go before the Chief Executive for consideration. After consideration, and usually within a further ten working days, you can expect a formal written response from the Chief Executive.

An independent internal review may also be requested at any stage if you wish to complain through an independent channel, although it should be understood that such a request may automatically bring to a halt any work already under way to investigate the complaint elsewhere in The National Archives.

If you are dissatisfied with the final response from the Chief Executive, you can refer your complaint to our independent complaints reviewer, ch&i associates. The complaints review service is entirely independent of The National Archives and can be contacted at:

ch&i associates
64 Plumstead Road
Norwich
NR1 4JU

Telephone 0330 133 1492

Email enquiries@chi-assoc.com

<http://www.chi-assoc.com/>

Should you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the external review, you can ask a Member of Parliament to raise your case with the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO).

6.3. Redress

When our services do not meet our published standards, we aim to make amends in a way that is appropriate to the problems experienced. Redress will always include:

- an apology
- an explanation of what happened and why

and where appropriate:

- we will take action to put things right
- we will give an assurance that the same thing will not happen again and take steps to ensure this

Since most services at The National Archives are provided without charge, redress will not normally take the form of a financial payment. However, we will consider the question of reimbursement if our mistakes or poor service have caused you additional expense or financial loss. We can only consider claims that are supported by evidence of loss. In addition, in unusual circumstances, we will consider whether a consolatory payment is appropriate in recognition of anxiety or distress caused to you. Because we are dealing with public funds, such payments will be small.

6.4 Treating The National Archives' staff fairly

When you compliment our service or our staff we will pass on your comments to the staff and managers concerned.

We will also pass on unfavourable comments so that our staff can learn from them and try to provide a better service.

The National Archives has a responsibility to ensure that members of staff are treated fairly if a complaint is made against them. They are entitled to:

- be informed immediately and fully of any complaint made about them and asked for their comments
- be kept informed of progress in the investigation of the complaint
- be told the outcome of the complaint investigation and the reasons for it

If a member of staff makes a complaint about a user of our services, or a counter-complaint in response to a complaint, the matter will be looked into by our Customer Service and Complaints Team or a manager from a different department. In the case of a counter-complaint, a separate investigating officer will be assigned to look into it, to ensure fairness.

6.5 Feedback

We welcome any comments on the fairness and efficiency of the complaints procedures and the effectiveness of The National Archives' replies to complaints. We will ask people who have made a complaint whether they are satisfied with the way their complaint was handled and the outcome. Sometimes we will use surveys to do this. We will take account of all feedback in annual reviews of our procedures.

7. How The National Archives responds to requests for information

If a complaint includes, or later leads to a request for information (for example, details of a policy, or documents from our files), we may be obliged to treat that request under the terms

Policy for handling comments and complaints

of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (Fol). Fol requests are handled separately from complaints and, while this will not affect the way that we respond to your complaint, it may lead to your receiving separate responses.

You can find out more information about making Fol requests on our website at <http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/freedom-of-information/making-a-freedom-of-information-request/>

8. Confidentiality

We respect the need for confidentiality when a complaint is made, both for the complainant and for members of staff who have a complaint made against them. We aim to investigate complaints with sensitivity, preserve confidentiality, and to share information only when it is a necessary part of the investigation.

Some information about complaints will be published (see 11 below) but this will not include any personal details of a confidential or sensitive nature. If a complaint is referred to the Independent Complaints Reviewer, the ICR may need to have access to confidential information as part of their investigation. However, strict rules of confidentiality are observed by the ICR Office.

9. Staff training

Receiving and responding to comments and complaints about our service is an integral part of providing the service. We will train our staff in our complaints procedures and ensure they understand the value of comments and complaints, so that they can carry out their roles and responsibilities with confidence.

10. Policy for dealing with unreasonably persistent enquiries

Our staff will treat people in a courteous, fair and proportionate manner and we expect similar courtesy and reasonable behaviour in return. Very occasionally, we will refuse to respond to a complaint. This will only happen if the person making the complaint is insulting or abusive towards our staff or if they refuse to accept that their complaint has been dealt with despite a thorough investigation on our part. We will only do this where it is absolutely necessary, and we will write to the person concerned to explain why we believe this to be the case. You can find out more information about unreasonably persistent enquiries on our website at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/persistent-enquiries-policy.pdf>

11. Recording and publishing statistical information

In accordance with The National Archives' transparency agenda (see <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/our-role/transparency/our-public-services/>), we will regularly publish anonymised information about the complaints we have received, which will include:

- Online satisfaction levels
- Onsite satisfaction levels
- Satisfaction levels from the legislation.gov.uk website
- Complaints feedback
- Examples of comments, requests, compliments and complaints and actions taken to improve our services.

In addition, the Independent Complaints Reviewer produces an annual statement that is included in The National Archives' Annual Report and Accounts.

12. Review of policy and procedures

We will review the complaints policy and procedures bi-annually.

Complaints Process

