

Complaints management systems — Guide to design and implementation

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Foreword

This British Standard has been prepared by Technical Committee SVS/8. It provides guidance on the design and operation of complaints management systems. This guide is based on best practice experience from a range of companies, organizations and service providers.

It gives guidance and recommendations only and should not be used as a specification for procedures or as a certification tool.

This standard is compatible with:

- BS 8800, *Guide to occupational health and safety management systems*;
- *How to deal with complaints*, published by the Service First Unit [1];
- *Recommendation on the principles applicable to the bodies responsible for out-of-court settlement of consumer disputes*, published by the European Commission [2].

Organizations with management systems conforming to either BS EN ISO 9001, BS EN ISO 14001 or BS 8800 should readily be able to introduce a complaints management system designed in accordance with this guide.

A British Standard does not purport to include all the necessary provisions of a contract. Users of British Standards are responsible for their correct application.

Compliance with a British Standard does not of itself confer immunity from legal obligations.

Summary of pages

This document comprises a front cover, an inside front cover, pages i and ii, pages 1 to 14, an inside back cover and a back cover.

Executive summary

Managing complaints well is a way to improve the products, services and public standing of an organization in the eyes of its customers. This standard gives guidance on setting up a complaints management system that will both satisfy external customers and help improve the overall performance of an organization.

Whatever the size of an organization, management of complaints is vital to creating and maintaining its effectiveness. If left unchecked, customer dissatisfaction may well have unwelcome knock-on effects. By actively encouraging complaints, an organization gains a second chance to capture customer loyalty and approval. This standard outlines the basic principles of effective complaints management. The main clauses of this standard give recommendations from which an organization can build its own complaints management system whether there are five employees or five hundred. The annexes provide background information and working examples to help design the right system.

From a customer's point of view, only three things matter if something goes wrong. They need to know where to complain, they need to know how to complain and they need to be made to feel confident that their complaint will be dealt with seriously. Regardless of the size and nature of an organization, some key factors count when putting this in place. Guidance is given on the following:

complaints policy: setting out a statement outlining the organization's commitment to dealing with customer complaints;

visibility: making sure customers know where to complain and have all the information to hand;

accessibility: letting the customer complain, with ease, at any point in the supply chain;

fairness: making the system fair to both customer and staff.

A complaints management system needn't be cumbersome or bureaucratic; the best solution for both customers and organization is often the simplest and quickest. This guide gives recommendations on the following operating elements of a complaints management system:

resources: assessing the needs of the system;

staff training: ensuring that those who face customers understand the system and are competent and understanding;

responsibility: empowering staff to deal quickly and efficiently with routine complaints;

escalation: ensuring that in the case of a serious complaint, things don't stand still, key staff are alerted and the problem is dealt with by whoever has the right expertise;

external review: selecting an independent route to complaints resolution when internal processes become deadlocked;

follow up action: learning from mistakes to improve products and services and the complaints system.

Figure 1 shows a typical system in outline plan.

The guidance in this standard emphasizes the importance of the information gained in the process. Feedback from customers is vital for the improvement of products or services. Keeping track of complaints also means that the complaints management service can be monitored and improved. Monitoring and analysing responses do not require elaborate systems if an organization is small. This standard gives guidance that will help tailor the complaints management system to the organizational needs it serves.

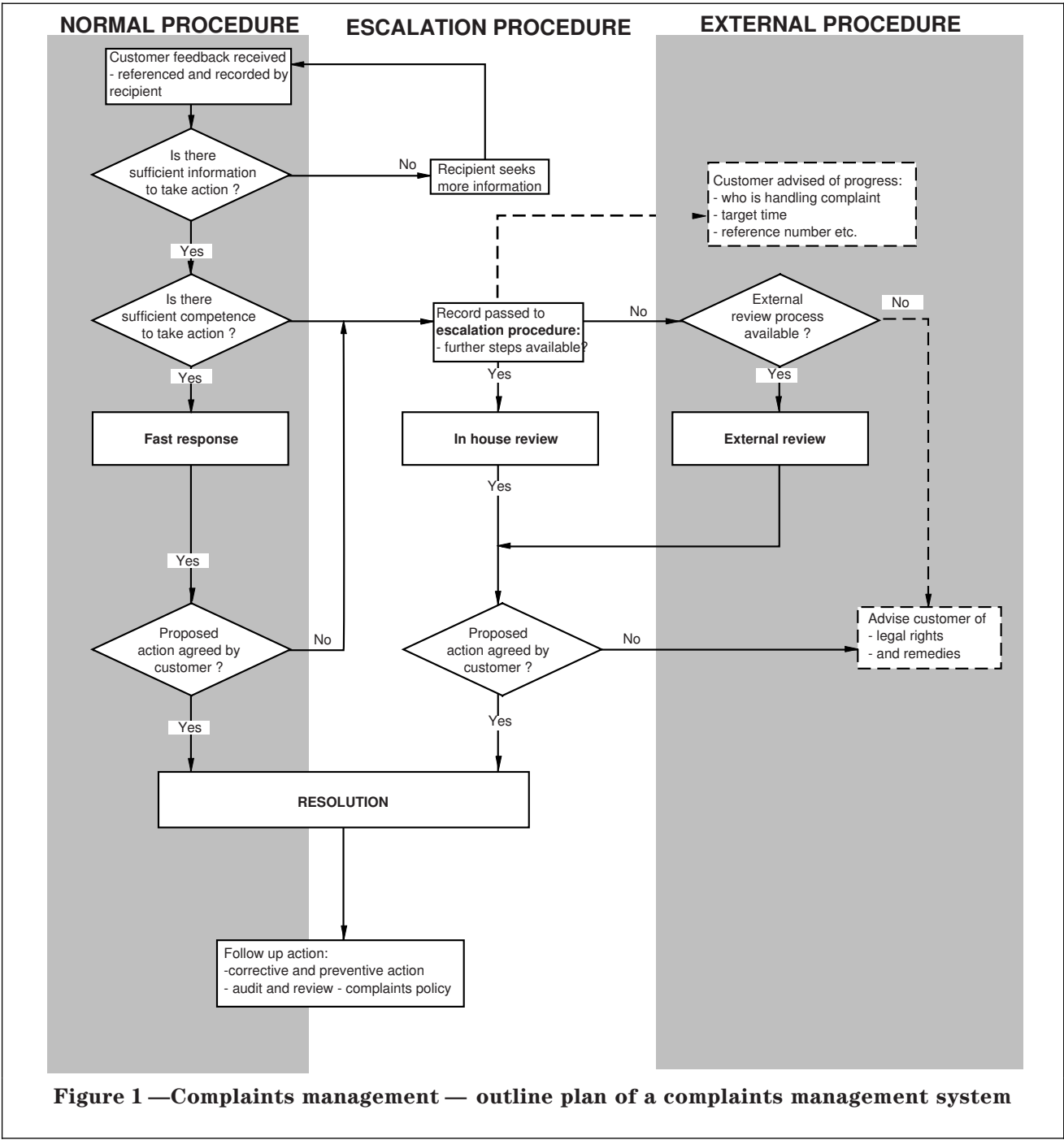


Figure 1 —Complaints management — outline plan of a complaints management system