

COMPLAINT HANDLING GUIDANCE



Introduction

This guidance supports CILEx Authorised Entities, CILEX Practitioners and CILEX members in meeting their responsibilities under Principle 5 of the [CILEx Code of Conduct](#) and in applying the [CILEx Regulation Complaint Handling Rules](#) (Complaint Handling Rules) as appropriate. It explains how to meet these requirements in practice and to handle first-tier complaints¹ in a way that is transparent, fair and consistent.

Its purpose is to help you design, communicate, and operate a clear and effective complaint handling procedure (CHP). A well-communicated and consistently followed CHP helps clients understand their right to complain and ensures they can do so in a way that is accessible and suited to their individual needs. You are encouraged to set out your CHP clearly, operate it fairly, and respond to complaints in a way that reflects the circumstances of each client.

This guidance supports compliance with the Complaint Handling Rules and encourages continuous improvement by using the insight gained from complaints to strengthen service delivery and client care.

You are encouraged to read this guidance alongside any other applicable regulatory requirements including the [CILEx Regulation Transparency Rules](#).

Benefits to you

A well-designed and consistently applied CHP brings significant benefits to your firm. It enhances client trust and satisfaction by demonstrating transparency, responsiveness and fairness. Qualities that reflect positively on your professionalism and reputation.

Proactively learning from complaints can also uncover recurring issues, enabling you to refine your procedures, reduce the likelihood of disputes escalating and strengthen the overall client experience. These improvements not only mitigate risk but also promote efficiency, client retention and long-term value, building a stronger, more resilient practice.

¹ Complaints that are made directly to a provider of legal services are often referred to as “first-tier complaints”, while complaints that are escalated to the Legal Ombudsman (LeO) or CILEx Regulation (CRL) are known as “second-tier complaints”.

Who the Complaint Handling Guidance applies to

This guidance applies to CILEX Authorised Entities², CILEX Practitioners and CILEX members. If you work in a firm regulated by another regulator, you will need to comply with that regulator's appropriate regulatory arrangements and guidance³.

Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is defined as:

An oral or written expression of dissatisfaction, which alleges that the complainant has suffered (or may suffer) financial loss, distress, inconvenience or other detriment.

A complaint can be about any aspect of the service you provide, for example, delays, unclear or infrequent communication, the quality of your work, unexpected costs, or how the client feels they have been treated. It might also arise if the client believes you have not followed their instructions, met their expectations, or acted in line with your professional responsibilities.

It is important to take a broad and inclusive approach to identifying complaints. Clients do not need to explicitly use the word "complaint" or put their concern in writing for their dissatisfaction to be taken seriously. Consider any suggestion of dissatisfaction from a client, whether raised in person, over the phone, by email or through another channel, such as through another member of staff, and, where appropriate, handle through your complaints procedure.

Third-party complaints

Not all complaints will come directly from your clients. Sometimes other people affected by your service may raise concerns, for example a family member of a client or a beneficiary in a probate matter. Where a concern is raised by another professional, such as a legal representative on the other side of a case, or the other party to a case, this would not be treated as a complaint about your service. If their concern indicates potential misconduct, it may instead be reported to CRL under the CILEX Code of Conduct.

² Including its officers, owners, managers and employees.

³ LSB [Guidance](#) on Section 112 Requirements on first-tier complaints paragraph 17 confirms section [52\(4\)](#) Legal Services Act 2007.

Third-party complaints may not always be covered by your formal complaints procedure, but they should still be considered carefully. Where it is appropriate, respond in a fair and proportionate way, taking into account the nature of the issue and the circumstances involved, giving consideration to the information you can disclose.

Who can complain to the Legal Ombudsman

When designing your CHP take account that not every complaint can be taken to the Legal Ombudsman (LeO). It is set out at section 2 of [LeO Scheme Rules](#) (April 2023) that LeO can only consider complaints brought by certain people and organisations. These include:

- Individual clients.
- Micro-enterprises (small businesses with fewer than 10 staff and turnover or balance sheet of less than €2 million at the time of complaint).
- Charities or clubs/associations with an annual income of less than £1 million.
- Trustees of trusts with assets worth less than £1 million.
- Personal representatives or beneficiaries of an estate where the person who received the legal services has died.

A complaint may also be continued by someone lawfully entitled to act for the complainant, for example an executor, someone with lasting power of attorney, or residuary beneficiaries of an estate.

LeO cannot normally deal with complaints made by public bodies, or by authorised persons (such as another lawyer) who arranged the services on behalf of someone else.

For full details, including eligibility thresholds, further eligible categories, and exclusions, please refer to section 2 - "Who can complain" - of [the Legal Ombudsman Scheme Rules](#).

When and how to inform clients about your complaint procedure

Complaint Handling Rules section 7

You must inform your clients about your complaints handling procedure and ensure that clients are informed:

- a) of the client's right to complain to you about services and charges, including how to complain and to whom;
- b) of any right the client has to complain to the Legal Ombudsman at the end of your complaint handling procedure if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint;
- c) that after eight weeks following the making of a complaint, if the complaint has not been resolved to their satisfaction, of any right to complain to the Legal Ombudsman;
- d) how to make a complaint to the Legal Ombudsman including:
 - (i) the time limits for doing so;
 - (ii) full details of how to contact the Legal Ombudsman;
 - (iii) information about how to make a complaint available from the Legal Ombudsman;
- e) of the client's right to complain to CILEx Regulation if the complaint does not fall within the Legal Ombudsman Scheme Rules and include full contact details: and

Your CHP explains:

- how to make a complaint, who to contact about a complaint and provides the time limits and process for resolving the complaint;
- sets out any right the client has to take the complaint to LeO if it is not resolved within eight weeks or if the client remains dissatisfied with your final written response to their complaint;
- provides a link to LeO information about how to make a complaint, currently found [here](#) on the LeO website;
- provides LeO's full and up to date contact details and time limits for taking a complaint to LeO. You could use the suggested wording below and the Legal Ombudsman provides [signposting information](#) which includes suggested wording for client care letters and complaints final written response letters;

- explains the client's right to raise a complaint with CRL if it falls outside LeO's remit and may involve professional conduct or a breach of the CILEX Code of Conduct, and the details of an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) body as appropriate together with whether that scheme would be used.

Suggested text about LeO

If at any point you become unhappy with the service we provide to you, then please inform us immediately so that we can do our best to resolve the problem for you. You can obtain a copy of our complaints procedure here [insert link].

If after receiving our final written response to your complaint you feel we have not resolved your complaint to your satisfaction or we have failed to provide you with a final written response to your complaint within eight weeks of you submitting your complaint, you can have your complaint independently looked at by the Legal Ombudsman. The Legal Ombudsman investigates complaints about service issues relating to the provision of lawyers.

Before accepting a complaint for investigation, the Legal Ombudsman will check that you have tried to resolve your complaint with us first. If you have, then you must take your complaint to the Legal Ombudsman:

- *within six months of receiving our final written response to your complaint or, if we have not provided a final written response to you within eight weeks, within six months starting at the expiry of the eight-week period;*
- *no more than one year from the date of the act or omission that gave rise to the complaint;*
- *no more than one year from when you should reasonably have known there was a cause for complaint.*

The Legal Ombudsman's contact details:

- *Website: www.legalombudsman.org.uk*
- *Telephone: 0300 555 0333 between 10am to 4pm.*
- *Relay UK: 18001 0300 555 0333*
- *Email: enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk*
- *Post: Legal Ombudsman PO BOX 6167, Slough, SL1 0EH*

It is important that you regularly check the LeO contact details to ensure that you have the most current contact details on your website, documents, letters and any other communications and publications.

Right to complain to CRL if the complaint does not fall within LeO Scheme Rules

You are required to comply with the CILEX Code of Conduct. Where an individual believes your conduct breaches the Code of Conduct, they can free of charge refer the complaint to CRL to investigate.

You will need to cover this in your CHP and can do so by using wording such as:

Where your complaint relates to the misconduct of a CILEX member, you can refer your complaint free of charge to CILEx Regulation for them to investigate. Misconduct complaints must be made within 12 months of the act or omission that gave rise to the complaint or within 12 months of the complainant having knowledge of the act or omission that gave rise to the complaint, whichever is the greater.

CILEx Regulation's contact details are:

- Website: <https://cilexregulation.org.uk>
- Telephone: 01234 845770;
- Email: info@cilexregulation.org.uk
- (Registered office: Room 301, Endeavour House, Wrest Park, Silsoe, Bedford, MK45 4HS. CILEx Regulation request no postal submissions please.)

Complaint Handling Rules section 8

You must inform clients of the information in section 7:

- a) at the time of engagement on a new matter or the next earliest appropriate opportunity;
- b) at the conclusion of the matter;
- c) upon request; and
- d) if a complaint is made during a matter.

You are encouraged to provide the information in section 7 of the Complaint Handling Rules to your clients when ever it is appropriate to do so.

There are four points during the work you carry out for a client when you are required to inform them of the information in section 7. These key points are: when they first instruct you or at the next earliest appropriate opportunity, at the conclusion of the matter, whenever a client asks for your CHP and whenever a complaint is made.

Data Protection Complaints

Some complaints may relate to how you have handled a client's personal data. These types of complaints fall within the remit of the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), which regulates compliance with data protection law.

Part of making clients aware of how their personal data is processed, includes information on how to raise concerns, by signposting clearly to your privacy notice. A data protection complaint might arise where information has been shared inappropriately with another party. For instance, if a client has a new partner and the former partner's contact details are inappropriately shared with the new partner, this could amount to a breach of data protection law.

You can signpost clients to more information on how to raise a concern with the ICO at [How to make a data protection complaint – ICO](#).

Good practice: inviting feedback

Actively inviting feedback from clients at appropriate points throughout a case helps you identify and address issues before they become formal complaints and enables you to adjust service provision to enhance client satisfaction.

There are natural points throughout the client journey, rather than waiting until the very end of a matter. These might include at exchange of contracts in conveyancing or shortly before trial. At these stages, reminding a client of your complaints information and inviting feedback can help you understand what clients perceive as good service, identify misunderstandings, and address any ongoing concerns before they escalate into formal complaints.

Make it simple and accessible for a client to provide feedback by offering options such as a follow-up call, short survey, or informal conversation at different stages during a case.

Use plain language and give clients a choice of communication methods, such as in person meeting, letter, email, phone call or online forms. You can demonstrate that their input is valued by acting on it and, where appropriate, letting them know what has changed as a result.

It is important to be alert to informal comments made by a client during everyday interactions. Responding positively in these moments can resolve concerns early and strengthen client trust.

Tailoring complaint information to client needs

Complaint Handling Rules section 9

You must effectively communicate your complaints handling procedure to each client in a format or formats reasonably tailored for the client's circumstances having due regard to their information needs.

Take reasonable steps to ensure that complaints information is provided in a format that suits each client's individual circumstances. This includes considering their communication needs, level of understanding, and any relevant vulnerabilities or protected characteristics. It is also important to consider this in relation to the publication requirements relating to your complaints policy in the Transparency Rules.

You might provide information:

- in large print or Easy Read
- in a different language⁴
- in audio format or video clips
- over the phone, online meeting or in person explanation.

Not every format will be necessary in every case, but you would be expected to make a reasonable effort to meet the needs of individual clients where these are known or can reasonably be anticipated. This may include proactively offering information in an alternative format where it is clear that a client may benefit from it. In some instances it may involve sensitively exploring with a client, and if necessary a person that supports them, what communication would be most beneficial for a client.

⁴ Where you serve a substantial number of clients who share a particular language(s), it may be reasonable to provide translated materials to support accessibility. Where only isolated cases arise, you might exercise your judgement on whether translation is proportionate, taking into account the individual client's needs and available alternatives.

Making complaint information easy to find

Complaint Handling Rules section 10

Your complaint handling procedure must:

- a) be prominent and accessible;

When publishing your complaint handling procedure (CHP) on your website, think about how it can be accessed and understood by the widest range of clients and consumers. Give consideration to the most frequent consumers using your services. Remember your obligations under the [Transparency Rules](#) (TR), as appropriate, to publish your CHP prominently in a clear and accessible format on, or via a link from, the homepage of your website.

Under the TR your CHP must be published prominently on your homepage or a page accessed via a link from your homepage and clearly signposted to from your homepage. Homepage has its usual meaning. It is the first page that visitors see when they access your website and is the default webpage that loads when a user visits a web address that only contains your domain name.

Your CHP, and the link to it, must be published prominently and in a clear and accessible format. The TR define prominently to mean: in a way that stands out so as to be easily seen; noticeably or conspicuously.

Publication of your CHP, or a link to it, in the footer of your website alone is not compliant with the TR.

The TR define clear and accessible format to mean: in a clear font and at least font size 11. It is helpful to look at how Arial font 11 presents and use this as a guide to what is acceptable. Clear and accessible fonts are easy to see, read and understand with distinct letters that do not contain unnecessary visual clutter that detracts from comprehension. Examples of readable fonts are: Arial, Veranda and Tahoma.

Keeping navigation simple and ensuring your website is compatible with assistive technology will help more people access the information. You may also want to use tools such as hover-over icons to provide extra explanations for those who want more detail, without making the main page crowded.

It is helpful to review your website regularly to make sure the content remains accurate and that all links work. Including straightforward contact details, such as an

email address and telephone number, encourages clients to get in touch to clarify information or raise concerns.

Under the TR, if you do not have a website, you must provide your CHP in a Consumer Information Leaflet, taking account of the information above about the need to tailor your complaint information to meet client and consumer needs. Your Consumer Information Leaflet is available on request.

Presenting complaints information clearly - key points

When providing complaints information, consider how to make it accessible, relevant, and easy to use for the typical clients that use your service. Using plain language, short sentences, avoiding legal jargon and providing clear explanations for any technical terms will help more people engage with the content. Where appropriate, provide translations or alternative formats to meet clients specific communication needs.

People often scan rather than read information in detail, so prioritise the information they most need to know and make it easy to find. This can be achieved through clear headings, short paragraphs, and visual cues such as summary boxes, diagrams, or well-placed bold text. Breaking down your procedure into clear stages can make it easier to follow.

Where it adds value, consider using imagery, short video clips, or animations to explain key points. Visual formats can help details stand out and make the content more memorable, while keeping the written text concise and easy to navigate.

Supporting vulnerable clients

Making your CHP accessible to all clients is especially important where clients may have some form of vulnerability. Many clients will experience some form of vulnerability when using legal services. This may be due to personal circumstances, the nature of the legal matter, or the emotional and financial pressures involved. In practice, this is the case for nearly all clients, as legal issues often arise at times of significant change, uncertainty, or stress. For example, the stakes may be high because of a potential financial loss, a family dispute, or the impact of a bereavement.

Vulnerability can take many forms. It may be temporary or long term, visible or hidden. It can arise from factors such as health conditions, language barriers, caring

responsibilities, financial difficulty, or lack of experience in dealing with legal matters. Recognising these factors and responding with understanding, patience, and clear communication will help clients feel supported and able to engage fully with your complaints process.

It is important to make sure that information is provided to clients in a way tailored to their individual needs as far as is reasonable. In some situations this may mean taking additional steps to provide or check understanding of information.

Receiving and acknowledging complaints

Complaint Handling Rules section 10

Your complaint handling procedure must:

- b) make provision for a client to make a complaint in a way that is reasonable and accessible to the client;
- c) explain how a complaint will be handled;
- d) set out the steps that will be taken in resolving a complaint;
- e) ensure that complaints made orally are acknowledged in writing, stating your understanding of the details of the complaint;
- f) provide information on the possible outcomes to a complaint, including any options if a complaint is not resolved to the complainant's satisfaction;
- g) provide for a complaint to be:
 - (i) investigated by a person of sufficient experience, seniority and competence who, where possible, was not directly involved in the particular act or omission giving rise to the complaint;
 - (ii) assessed competently, diligently, and impartially;
 - (iii) responded to fairly, consistently, and promptly;
 - (iv) resolved at the earliest possible opportunity;
 - (v) dealt with free of charge;
- h) ensure that when a complaint is first notified, you must provide the complainant with:
 - (i) a prompt acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint;
 - (ii) clear and comprehensive information about your complaints handling procedure that will apply to their complaint and how it will be handled, including the information specified in section 7;
 - (iii) information on who the complainant may contact about their complaint;
 - (iv) a timeline for the resolution of the complaint.

Your CHP needs to build in provision for a range of ways that allow a client to complain that are reasonable and accessible to the client. Think about the methods of communicating with your clients that you currently use and you might wish to include these within your CHP.

If a complaint is made orally, confirm the details in writing so both you and the complainant are clear about the nature of the concern and how it will be addressed. Acknowledge the complaint as soon as reasonably possible, ideally within two working days⁵, to show the complaint is being taken seriously and to build trust.

The acknowledgement can confirm that the complaint has been received, summarise the issues raised, outline the process that you will follow to deal with the complaint, give the expected timeframe for a full response, and provide the contact details of the person handling it.

It is good practice for another member of staff, other than the person dealing with the client's case to deal with a complaint. You may have a designated person who handles complaints. This provides the reassurance to a client of independence in investigating a complaint.

Complaints are dealt with at no cost to the client. LeO's service is also free for complainants, and CRL investigates allegations of misconduct without charging the complainant. Clients are often concerned and can be deterred from raising a concern because they think that they will have to pay to do so. Other frequent worries for clients that cause reluctance to raise a concern include the impact on progression of their case and their relationship with you. It is important to recognise these types of potential concerns and emphasise that there will be no charge or other impact in your CHP and communications about a complaint to provide reassurance to clients.

Sole practitioners

If you are a sole practitioner, you may not have another member of staff to handle a complaint. In this situation, you can still provide a fair and transparent process by taking steps to review the matter as objectively as possible. You should actively communicate that you will do this to a client to give them confidence in the process.

⁵ LeO guide "[Listen, Inform, Respond: a guide to good complaints handling](#)" (current at August 2025), which advises that acknowledging a complaint within two working days of receipt enhances consumer confidence in the complaints handling process.

Make it clear to your client that their concerns will be considered thoroughly and without bias, even though you will be the one investigating. Reassure them that you will approach the complaint with an open mind, take into account all relevant information, and aim to reach a resolution that is fair to all parties.

Where appropriate, you may wish to seek input from an external colleague or peer to provide an independent perspective. In such cases, it is essential to ensure this practice complies with client confidentiality and data protection requirements. This includes obtaining the appropriate consent to sharing information potentially outside your firm from your client, and any others where necessary, and recording this before any referral takes place.

If you have an arrangement with another practitioner to review complaints on your behalf, explain how this works and what the client can expect from the process.

Responding to and resolving complaints

Complaints should be handled in a way that is clear, fair and proportionate. The response needs to match the seriousness of the concern and show a genuine commitment to resolving the issue.

Your final response to a complaint should be in writing and be easy to understand, address the points raised, explain the outcome and the reasons for it, confirm any remedy being offered, and include details of the client's right if they remain dissatisfied to refer the complaint to the Legal Ombudsman or CRL with the relevant information, contact details and time limits. For the Legal Ombudsman these are:

- that the client must refer the complaint to the Legal Ombudsman within six months of your final written response;
- that the Legal Ombudsman expects complaints to be made to them within one year of the date of the act or omission about which the client is concerned or within one year of the client realising there was a concern;
- The Legal Ombudsman's contact details:
 - Website: www.legalombudsman.org.uk
 - Telephone: 0300 555 0333 between 10am to 4pm.
 - Relay UK: 18001 0300 555 0333
 - Email: enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk
 - Post: Legal Ombudsman PO BOX 6167, Slough, SL1 0EH

If the information above is not included in your final written response, there is a high risk that the Legal Ombudsman will waive the six-month time limit and accept a complaint for investigation.

For CRL the referral should be as soon as possible and must be within one year of the date of the act or omission about which the client is concerned or within one year of the client realising there was a concern. The contact details are:

- Website: <https://cilexregulation.org.uk>
- Telephone: 01234 845770;
- Email: info@cilexregulation.org.uk
- (Registered office: Room 301, Endeavour House, Wrest Park, Silsoe, Bedford, MK45 4HS. CILEx Regulation request no postal submissions please.)

Our regulated firms need to explain to a client in their written response that, as your regulator, CRL may seek access to the client's papers and that, in these circumstances, you will grant CRL access unless the client objects.

Aim to resolve complaints within eight weeks of receipt. If this is not possible, let the client know the reasons for the delay and confirm their right to contact LeO after the eight-week period.

Keep the client informed throughout and providing regular updates is key. It is important to communicate in a way that suits a client's needs, taking account of any accessibility requirements, or additional support they need from you or another person.

Early resolution

Not every complaint can be avoided, so recognising when a concern is being raised and addressing it promptly is important.

Resolving complaints or expressed dissatisfaction at the earliest and most appropriate point improves a client's experience and is often the most cost-effective approach. Early resolution involves working with the client to understand what went wrong and how to put it right. An early explanation or a quick and sincere apology can sometimes be more valuable to a client than a financial remedy offered much later.

Taking this approach can help maintain trust and avoid unnecessary escalation. Wherever possible, it is good practice to resolve a complaint at the earliest opportunity, whether through an explanation or apology, or another appropriate remedy such as a refund or corrective action. For further guidance on resolving

complaints and appropriate remedies, you may find the [Legal Ombudsman's Guidance on Remedies](#) helpful.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

Complaint Handling Rules section 7f)

You must inform your clients about your complaints handling procedure and ensure that clients are informed:

- a) the name and website address of an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) approved body which would be competent to deal with the complaint; and whether you agree to use the scheme operated by that body.

Check if a client is eligible to use ADR

Under the Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes (Competent Authorities and Information) Regulations 2015, only a consumer may bring a complaint to an ADR body. A consumer is defined in regulation 3 as *“an individual acting for purposes which are wholly or mainly outside that individual’s trade, business, craft or profession.”*

Under the ADR for Consumer Disputes (Amendment) Regulations 2015, clients need to be given the name and website address of an approved Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) body that could deal with their complaint, along with confirmation of whether you would agree to use that scheme. This applies whether or not you choose to take part in the ADR process.

This information should be set out clearly in client care documents at the start of the matter and repeated at the end of your complaints process, particularly where the issue has not been resolved to the client’s satisfaction. Make sure the details are accessible and presented in plain, easy-to-follow language.

Even if you do not intend to take part in ADR, the information still needs to be provided. Not doing so could mean a breach of the ADR Regulations and may also put you at risk of non-compliance with Principle 4 of the CILEx Code of Conduct.

A current list of approved ADR providers is available on the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) [website](#). It’s worth checking that the provider you name is still on this list before making a referral.

This is a separate obligation from informing clients about their right to refer service-related concerns to the Legal Ombudsman or professional conduct matters to CILEx Regulation.

	Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) – for all firms
CILEX members working in a firm regulated by another regulator	Comply with your employer’s guidance on signposting consumers to an approved Alternative Dispute Resolution body.
CILEX Fellows working in their own non-regulated firm	You must signpost consumers to an approved Alternative Dispute Resolution body, although there is no obligation on you to use the approved ADR.
CILEX members working in their own non-regulated firm	
CILEX Authorised Entity	

You can cover this requirement in your CHP by including wording such as:

Alternative Dispute Resolution bodies such as (include the name and contact details of an ADR Approved body) exist which are competent to deal with complaints about legal services should you and our firm wish to use such an ADR body. We (state whether you do or do not) agree to use (include the name of the ADR body). (And if you do agree to use an ADR body you will need to include the timescale for contacting them about a complaint).

Vexatious or frivolous complaints

There may be times when a complaint seems vexatious or frivolous. Even so, it is important not to dismiss it without fair and proper consideration.

The [Legal Services Board’s section 162 guidance](#) recognises that such complaints can arise and allows regulators discretion to decide what is appropriate and proportionate. In using this discretion, care should be taken not to overlook genuine concerns or treat valid complaints unfairly.

Every complaint should be considered on its own merits, taking time to understand the issues raised and deciding on a fair and balanced response.

When assessing whether a complaint is vexatious or frivolous, it can help to reflect on:

- whether the same issues have already been addressed in full
- whether new concerns are being raised
- whether the complaint is being used to harass or burden staff
- whether the type of work involved (such as family law or contentious probate) may naturally lead to heightened sensitivities or strong emotions

If you decide not to proceed with a complaint, keep a written record of your reasons. Where appropriate, offer the complainant a brief written explanation and confirm their right to take the matter to the LeO or CRI where appropriate.

For further guidance, you may wish to consult the Legal Ombudsman's resource:

[Responding to challenging situations.](#)

Distinguishing between service and conduct complaints

Complaint Handling Rules section 7

You must inform your clients about your complaint handling procedure and ensure that clients are informed:

- a) of any right the client has to complain to the Legal Ombudsman at the end of your complaints handling procedure if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint;
- b) that after eight weeks following the making of a complaint, if the complaint has not been resolved to their satisfaction, of any right to complain to the Legal Ombudsman;
- c) how to make a complaint to the Legal Ombudsman including:
 - (i) the time limits for doing so;
 - (ii) full details of how to contact the Legal Ombudsman;
 - (iii) information about how to make a complaint available from the Legal Ombudsman;
- d) of the client's right to complain to CILEx Regulation if the complaint does not fall within the Legal Ombudsman Scheme Rules and include full contact details;

Clients may raise concerns about both the quality of service they receive and your professional conduct. It is important that the difference between these types of complaints is understood and to guide clients to the appropriate route for addressing their concerns. It may assist clients to be informed that:

- **Service complaints** relate to the standard of service provided. This might include issues such as delays, poor communication, or administrative errors. These complaints should usually be handled through your internal complaints procedure. If the matter is not resolved, the client may refer it to the Legal Ombudsman.
- **Conduct complaints** involve potential breaches of the CILEX Code of Conduct, such as dishonesty, discrimination, or serious failures to act with integrity or maintain independence. These matters may be referred to CILEX Regulation, which has the authority to investigate and take disciplinary action where appropriate.

Some complaints may contain both service and conduct elements. For example, a complaint about a delay might be accompanied by issues that your communication has been inappropriate or disrespectful. In such situations, it may be necessary to inform the client that their concerns could be considered by more than one organisation, depending on the nature of the issues raised.

To help clients understand where to direct their complaint:

- make your CHP available in clear and accessible language, avoiding technical terms;
- include a copy or summary of the CILEX Code of Conduct or a link to it; and
- clearly explain which organisation (LeO or CRL) handles which types of issues.

It is important to avoid discouraging clients from raising concerns, even if you think the issue falls outside your direct responsibilities. When in doubt, provide clear signposting and let the relevant organisation decide whether it can consider the matter.

If a complaint is made to LeO or CRL by one of your clients or your employer's clients, you need to cooperate with LeO or CRL and assist them to deal with the complaint. This is a requirement of Principle 4 of the CILEX Code of Conduct.

	Complaints about service signpost to:	Complaints about conduct signpost to:
CILEX members working in a firm regulated by another regulator	Legal Ombudsman	CILEx Regulation
CILEX practitioners working in a non-regulated firm	Legal Ombudsman	CILEx Regulation
CILEX Fellows	Legal Ombudsman	CILEx Regulation
CILEX members working in their own non-regulated firm	CILEx Regulation	CILEx Regulation
CILEX Authorised Entity	Legal Ombudsman	CILEx Regulation

Recording and reviewing complaints

Complaint Handling Rules Section 13

You must maintain records for each complaint including:

- a) details of the complaint;
- b) how it is dealt with; and
- c) the outcome.

Keeping full, clear and accurate records of all complaints, regardless of how they are received or resolved is essential and helps maintain transparency and supports the identification of patterns, risks, and areas for improvement.

We recommend that you maintain a log of all complaints, separate to the client file, in which you record all the relevant information, including:

- the details of the complaint
- how it was handled
- the outcome
- any remedy offered and whether it was accepted
- relevant correspondence and file notes
- whether a complaint has been referred to LeO and the reasons for the referral.

Reviewing complaints is an important part of maintaining and improving the quality of both the way that you handle complaints and the service you provide to clients. The purpose of reviewing is to identify what can be learned from each complaint and to

determine whether changes are needed to prevent similar issues and improve your practice in the future.

This involves looking beyond the immediate resolution to consider the root causes of the complaint. It may mean reviewing parts of your practice such as systems, processes, communication methods, or training needs. Regularly analysing complaints in this way helps ensure that your complaints procedure is effective, fair, and continually improving.

Periodic reviews of complaints data can be a valuable tool for improving both complaints-handling procedures and the overall client experience. Such reviews also demonstrate a commitment to fairness, accountability, and continuous learning. It is helpful to have clear internal processes for reporting complaints and acting on any findings, so that learning is shared and embedded across the organisation.

Learning from complaints

Complaint Handling Rules sections 14 and 15

14. You must implement measures to:

- a) identify any risks or issues including systemic issues in:
 - (i) how it has assessed and sought to resolve complaints and
 - (ii) in its services, and
- b) address those risks and issues;

15. You must consider and undertake appropriate training and provide appropriate support to address the risks and issues identified in section 14a).

Complaints are an important source of insight. They provide valuable opportunities to identify where services have not met expected standards and how they can be improved.

You must take appropriate steps to identify any trends or risks that emerge from the complaints you receive. This includes recognising systemic issues in your complaints handling process or in the quality of service provided to clients.

Where patterns are identified, such as recurring issues in communication, timeliness, or conduct, you should:

- consider how internal procedures or practices may need to change

- identify whether training or additional support is needed for staff
- take action to reduce the likelihood of similar complaints arising in future

Reviewing complaints regularly, and embedding learning into your risk management and training processes, demonstrates a proactive and accountable approach to service quality. It also reinforces client confidence in your ability to handle concerns fairly and constructively.

You will need be able to evidence how complaints have led to improvements, either through changes in process, updated policies, or further training.