

Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure

Complaints Policy

The aim of the Natural History Museum's Complaint Policy is to ensure that a customer complaint or perceived failure of service is taken seriously and addressed so that goodwill is fully restored and that the reputation of the Museum remains intact in the eyes of its customers and other stakeholders. An important outcome is to ensure complainants are transformed into potential loyal, lifelong supporters of the Museum.

Effective management of complaints can help to inform managers who can then initiate plans for service improvement, which, in turn, can help to improve the overall quality of the visitor experience and inform both service level agreements and employees' action plans etc.

Dealing with Complaints from Customers in the Museum

In order to restore goodwill, all staff are responsible for ensuring that all complaints, received by them, are dealt with quickly and effectively. It is the intention that the complainant is content with the outcome.

When first dealing with the complainant it is advisable for the member of staff to introduce himself or herself.

Where appropriate a more formal greeting such a handshake is helpful to diffuse a potentially difficult situation.

The member of staff should carefully and objectively listen and assess the complaint and where possible bring it to a satisfactory conclusion.

It is important that the member of staff does not take the complaint personally.

The member of staff should not place themselves in a potentially unsafe or dangerous position.

If the customer requests a manager then the member of staff should call one immediately. The Duty Manager or the Customer Services Manager can also be called.

If the complaint is directed at the members of staff themselves and if the situation is likely to be unresolved or becomes aggravated, the member of staff should call a supervisor or manager. The customer should be informed of this.

Serious or complex complaints relating to staff behaviour or Museum policy should always be referred to the Duty Manager (DM) or another relevant manager. If appropriate the issue can be incorporated on the daily DM report. The Museum Manager or Customer Services will then pick this up.

If there is a dispute between a member of staff and a customer then the manager should separate the two parties and if appropriate take the customer aside or to a quiet space so that they can explain the situation. A positive outcome should always be the goal. However a settlement may need to be negotiated.

If a supervisor or manager is not involved then it is advisable for the member of staff to later mention the incident to a manager and/or Customer Services so that the Museum is pre-warned if the customer pursues the issue.

It is good to ask the complainant how they would like the goodwill to be restored.

A resolution which has financial implications should be at the discretion of a manager.

A refund can only be authorised by a supervisor or manager.

Where the complaint is relevant to a specific area it is then responsibility of the respective manager to investigate further and to report outcome to Museum Manager or to Customer Services Manager.

If the complaint is urgent and manager of the specific area is not present then the DM is responsible for investigating and resolving. This is then logged in the daily DM report.

Any resolution or outcome should be explained to the customer in a polite, careful and diplomatic manner.

A feedback leaflet should only be handed to a complainant if they are in a hurry and cannot stay for a resolution. The member of staff dealing with the complaint should give every assistance to resolve the complaint before the customer leaves the Museum.

A feedback leaflet can always be used by the member of staff to record the complaint after it has been resolved. This will help Customer Services to capture the information for the database.

After the event staff are recommended to report all complaints to Customer Services, directly or via their supervisor or manager, so that a database record can be kept and the complaints monitored and tracked.

The Museum Manager will normally delegate investigation of complaint to the respective manager. Customer Services will record complaint and track its progress.

If a customer becomes violent then security must be called immediately.

A customer should never be unhappy when they leave the Museum.

Complaints sent from outside the Museum

These can be received by various means such as by phone, letter or email. Ideally the complainant should be contacted immediately the complaint is received.

Listening and empathising with the customer and understanding their situation is essential if the complaint is to be resolved effectively.

If an urgent or in-depth response is required, the complainant should be contacted immediately, preferably by phone.

If considered appropriate the complaint would then be allocated to an appropriate manager who will then investigate.

The complainant should be informed of the outcome as soon as possible. This is dependant on the means of communication.

With complaints requiring investigation, an acknowledgement letter is sent within 2 working days and the detailed response is sent within the following 5 – 10 days or sooner if possible.

Obligations for compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995, 2005.

If complaints regarding disabled access (physical, sensory, cognitive) with possible DDA implications are received by museum staff they are recommended to inform Customer Services as a matter of urgency. Customer Services will then work closely with colleagues who specialise in DDA issues, investigate the complaint and initiate any appropriate action.

If the complainant is in the museum then the Customer Services Manager or Duty Manager should be called to assist.

A DDA enquiry should be managed by the designated stakeholders and Customer Services informed immediately.

Obligations for compliance with the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations

If the complaint is deemed to fall under FOI legislation – a request for information that the Museum holds – then a formal response must be given within 20 working days from the day after receipt of a written communication.

Any other complaints or enquiries involving environmental information, under the Environmental Information Regulations, do not have to be written down and can be dealt with at the time. However if further information needs to be obtained the customer's details should be recorded and a response communicated to them within 20 working days.

Please refer to the Museum policy on FOI and/or the Museum Archivist for further guidance.

However in most cases it is expected that any difficult situation is defused and resolved amicably.

How long does it take to deal with complaints?

Depending on the severity of the complaint and the means by which it was communicated, the average response time is between 0 and 10 working days. Any investigation may prolong this period. However it is advisable that the customer is kept informed of progress etc.

Recording and tracking

All enquiries and feedback, including complaints, received by Customer Services are recorded* on a computer database. For ease of tracking it is recommended that all DDA-related communications and correspondence are also recorded by Customer Services.

*Personal details can only be kept on the database with the consent of the individual concerned (Data Protection Act)

Making or Reporting a Complaint

Customer Services will listen to complaints or feedback from our customers (including colleagues), and can be contacted between 10.00 and 18.00, Mondays to Fridays, at the following:

Robert How: Service Evaluation and Customer Services Manager
Jeremiah Mangonon - McGrath: Customer Services Assistant
The Natural History Museum
Cromwell Road
London
SW7 5BD
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7942 5511/5839
Email: feedback@nhm.ac.uk

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