

Complaints to solicitors

This document is a preview of the questions for the **'Complaints to solicitors'** questionnaire. You can use this document to prepare your answers and make notes in advance of completing the online questionnaire at the link we will provide.

Please **do not** submit your final response using this document.

Section 1: Introduction

No questions, click 'Next' button (or arrow if on mobile) to continue.

Section 2: About your firm

In this section you will be asked to enter your firm's name (Q1) and your firm's SRA number (Q2)

Section 3: Complaints Procedures

Q3

Does your firm have a complaints procedure?

(Single select)

- Yes
- No

If you answered yes, go to Q5

If you answered no, go to Q4. You will also be shown the following instructional text:

'You have told us you do not have a complaints procedure.

In the questions concerning dealing with complaints, please answer based on how your firm has generally tackled complaints, or would expect to do so when complaints are made.'

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You must complete the online form

Q3 – Your notes

Q3 – Your notes

Q4 – This is for those who answered No to Q3

Please tell us why your firm does not have a complaints procedure?

(Multiple select)

- We have never had a complaint
- Very few complaints received
- We always deal with concerns or complaints informally
- Complaints are dealt with on a case-by-case basis
- Everyone in our firm knows how to handle complaints
- Other - please specify (*text box*)
- Don't know (*exclusive, unticks other options if chosen*)

Q4 – Your notes

Q4 – Your notes

Q5 – This is for those who answered yes to Q3

How are staff made aware of the firm's complaint procedure?

(Multiple select)

- As part of induction
- Through training sessions
- An email reminder
- Written policies (online and/or printed)
- Signs around office
- Other - please specify (*text box*)

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If you selected 'Through training sessions' as one of your answers, you need to answer Q6 and Q7

If you did not choose 'Through training sessions' please skip Q6 and Q7.

Q5 – Your notes

Q6 – This is for those that selected 'Through training sessions' for Q5

When was training on dealing with complaints last provided?

(Single select)

- In the last 12 months
- 1–2 years ago
- 2+ years ago
- Don't know

Q6 – Your notes

Q7 – This is for those that selected 'Through training sessions' for Q5

What did the training cover?

(Multiple select)

- Recognising complaints
- Customer service
- Firm's complaints processes
- Legal considerations
- Providing feedback to clients
- Don't know (*exclusive, unticks other options if chosen*)
- Other - please specify (*text box*)

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Q7 – Your notes

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Section 4: Identifying complaints

Q8

Has your firm ever received any of the following?

(Multiple select)

- Expression of dissatisfaction verbally to the fee earner
- Expression of dissatisfaction verbally to other client-facing staff
- Expression of dissatisfaction in writing (including email)
- Expression of dissatisfaction through other media, such as text or messaging apps
- Someone telling the fee earner that they want to make a complaint
- Someone making a formal written complaint
- None ever received (*exclusive, unticks other options if chosen*)

Q8 – Your notes

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Q9

When recording the number of complaints you receive, which of the following does your firm identify as a complaint? (select all that apply)

(Multiple select)

- Expression of dissatisfaction verbally to the fee earner
- Expression of dissatisfaction verbally to other client-facing staff
- Expression of dissatisfaction in writing (including email)
- Expression of dissatisfaction through other media, such as text or messaging apps
- When someone tells the fee earner that they want to make a complaint
- When someone makes a formal written complaint
- Other – please specify (*text box*)

Q9 – Your notes

Section 5: Complaints in practice

Q10

When are clients informed about how to complain to your firm?

(Multiple select)

- In writing at the outset of the matter
- Verbally at the outset of the matter
- When they express dissatisfaction
- When they say they want to make a complaint
- In writing at the end of the legal matter
- Our complaints procedure is on our website
- Clients are not specifically informed (*exclusive, unticks other options if chosen*)
- Other - please specify (*text box*)

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Q10 – Your notes

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Q11

How can clients make a formal complaint?

A formal complaint is one that has gone through your organisation's complaint handling procedure. This includes written and oral complaints, and those that may initially be made to a third party and referred back to you to address. This does not include concerns raised by a client about your service provision that were not taken forward as a formal complaint.

(Multiple select)

- In person
- In an online meeting (e.g. Zoom, MS-Teams)
- By telephone
- By email
- By letter
- Through text messages or messaging apps, eg WhatsApp
- Other - please specify (*text box*)

Q11 – Your notes

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Q12

Does your firm use or engage with third parties as part of your complaints process?

Third parties could include organisations providing Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), or other law firms.

(Multiple select)

- Yes, we refer complaints to another independent regulated legal provider to review
- Yes, we use a third party (other than another regulated firm) to review, or support with handling, our complaints
- No, we do not use or engage with a third party (*exclusive, unticks other options if chosen*)

Q12 – Your notes

Q13

Does your firm engage with third parties that clients have chosen to use?

This could be an ADR provider resolving complaints (other than the Legal Ombudsman) or a support organisation that helps clients raise a complaint e.g. Resolver.

(Multiple select)

- Yes, we tell clients about third parties that they can use to help resolve their complaint with us if they wish to
- We don't tell clients about third parties, but we do allow clients to use an external provider to assist them with their complaint, should they wish to do so
- No, we do not engage with third parties (other than the Legal Ombudsman) as part of our complaints process (*exclusive, unticks other options if chosen*)

Q13 – Your notes

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Section 6: Complaints process

Q14

Does your complaints process include any of the following stages?

(Multiple select)

- An attempt to resolve the matter informally
- Require a written complaint
- Send acknowledgement of complaint within a specified timeframe
- Require a face to face meeting
- Investigation stage
- Client has the right to an internal review by senior member of staff/partner
- Information provided about taking forward a complaint if not satisfied, e.g. to Legal Ombudsman.
- No mandatory stages / no specific processes (*exclusive, unticks other options if chosen*)

Q14 – Your notes

Q15

In your firm, who initially deals, or would deal, with a complaint?

(Multiple select)

- The fee earner
- Sole principal
- The complaints handling partner
- The Compliance Officer for Legal Practice (COLP)/ Compliance Officer for Finance and Administration (COFA)
- The complaints handling team
- A senior partner
- An independent third party
- Varies according to the type of complaint
- Other - please specify (*text box*)

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You must complete the online form

Q15 – Your notes

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Q16

In your firm, who provides, or would provide, the final response to a complaint?

(Multiple select)

- The fee earner
- Sole principal
- The complaints handling partner
- The Compliance Officer for Legal Practice (COLP)/ Compliance Officer for Finance and Administration (COFA)
- The complaints handling team
- A senior partner
- An independent third party
- Varies according to the type of complaint
- Other - please specify (*text box*)

Q16 – Your notes

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Q17

What guidelines, if any, does your firm have for how complaints should be investigated?

(Multiple select)

- We suggest which documents should be referred to in the investigation
- We set out how to deal with complaints from clients
- We have guidelines for dealing with potentially vulnerable clients who may wish to make a complaint
- We set out key milestones for contacting our clients
- We set out how to escalate the complaint through our process
- Complaints are dealt with on a case-by-case basis
- Different fee earners or complaint handlers have different ways of investigating a complaint
- Other - please specify (*textbox*)
- There are no specific guidelines (*exclusive, unticks other options if chosen*)

Q17 – Your notes

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Q18

Which of the following does, or would, your firm consider to be important when deciding on an appropriate remedy?

(Multiple select)

- Nature of the complaint (eg delay, cost information, or not following instructions)
- Internal discussion following investigation of a complaint
- Desire to maintain a good relationship with the client
- Desire by the firm and the client to resolve the complaint amicably
- Client's circumstances and/or possible vulnerabilities
- Complexity of the matter
- Internal resource being used on the complaint
- Previous complaints we have received of a similar nature
- Legal Ombudsman's time limits
- Legal Ombudsman's guidance on appropriate remedies
- Legal Ombudsman's case fee
- Advice from another party (eg Legal Ombudsman or another firm)
- Don't know (*exclusive, unticks other options if chosen*)
- Other - please specify (*text box*)

Q18 – Your notes

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Section 7: Experience with complaints

Q19

In your firm, what is the average time taken to provide the final response to a complaint?

(Single select)

- Within one week
- Within two weeks
- Within four weeks
- Within eight weeks
- Within 12 weeks
- More than 12 weeks
- No or too few complaints received

Q19 – Your notes

Q20

What are the common remedies your firm offers to try to resolve complaints?

(Multiple select)

- An explanation to the client regarding their concern/s
- Agreement to progress the client's case within an agreed timeframe
- Returning the client's documents
- Non-financial gesture (eg chocolates/flowers)
- An apology
- Completion or correction of work, free of charge
- Compensation for distress or inconvenience
- Compensation for financial loss
- A complete or partial refund of fees
- None or few complaints leading to a remedy (*exclusive, unticks other options if chosen*)
- Other - please specify (*text box*)

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Q20 – Your notes

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Q21

Which of the following, if any, are concerns when handling complaints?

(Multiple select)

- Concerns about the restrictions put in place by our insurers
- It can be difficult to identify when a client is expressing dissatisfaction that may turn into a complaint
- It can be difficult to identify appropriate remedies
- It is difficult to dedicate resources to handling complaints
- Clients can sometimes have unrealistic expectations about their case/the process
- It is not always clear how to interpret the guidance from the Legal Ombudsman
- It is not always clear how to interpret the guidance from the Solicitors Regulation Authority
- It is sometimes easier to offer compensation to the client rather than pay the Legal Ombudsman's case fee
- None or too few complaints received (*exclusive, unticks other options if chosen*)

Q21 – Your notes

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Section 8: Regulatory bodies

Q22

When, if at all, does your firm inform clients about how and when a complaint can be made to the Legal Ombudsman?

(Multiple select)

- In writing at the outset of the matter
- Verbally at the outset of the matter
- When they express dissatisfaction
- When they say they want to make a complaint
- In writing at the end of the matter
- In writing at the end of our complaints procedure
- At the end of our complaints procedure, only when a client's complaint is unresolved
- The information is on our website
- Not informed (*exclusive, unticks other options if chosen*)
- Other - please specify (*text box*)

Q22 – Your notes

We will not accept responses submitted using this form.
You must complete the online form

Q23

When, if at all, does your firm inform clients about how and when a report can be made to the Solicitors Regulation Authority

(Multiple select)

- In writing at the outset of the matter
- Verbally at the outset of the matter
- When they express dissatisfaction
- When they say they want to make a complaint
- In writing at the end of the matter
- Clients are not specifically informed
- In writing at the end of our complaints procedure
- At the end of our complaints procedure, only when a client's complaint is unresolved
- The information is on our website
- Not informed (*exclusive, unticks other options if chosen*)
- Other - please specify (*text box*)

Q23 – Your notes

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Section 9: Client experience and expectations

Q24

What do you think are clients' key expectations for the service they receive from your firm?

(Multiple select)

- Positive outcome/achieving their aim
- Clear cost information
- Affordable costs
- Responding to queries promptly
- Regular updates on progress
- Use of plain English/clear communication
- Don't know (*exclusive, unticks other options if chosen*)
- Other - please specify (*text box*)

Q24 – Your notes

Q25

When, if at all, does your firm identify clients who require additional support? (e.g. with a need for reasonable adjustments or potentially vulnerable clients).

(Multiple select)

- At the outset when onboarding clients
- Through relevant follow-up questions
- At any time we recognise a client needs additional support
- Not required as all services are individually tailored to clients
- No specific mechanism for this
- Not relevant to our clients (*exclusive, unticks other options if chosen*)
- Other - please specify (*text box*)

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Q25 – Your notes

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Q26

How, if at all, does your firm offer to support clients needing additional support, including when making complaints?

(Multiple select)

- Material is made available in a range of formats
- Interpretation and translation services
- Easier explanations can be made available
- Inviting the client to an in-person meeting
- Encouraging the client to be supported by a friend/family member/somebody who can advocate on their behalf
- Giving additional time to reflect on the firm's response or decision
- Making all services accessible
- No specific steps (*exclusive, unticks other options if chosen*)
- Other - please specify (*text box*)

Q26 – Your notes

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Q27

What do you think are the main reasons which might stop clients from making complaints to firms?

(Multiple select)

- They do not know how to make a complaint
- They think the complaints procedure is too complex
- They think it will cost them to complain
- They think it might delay their case, take too long
- They think it might affect the outcome of their case
- They think it might affect their relationship with their solicitor
- They feel nervous about approaching their solicitor
- They think their solicitor knows more than they do
- They wouldn't trust the firm to deal with it properly
- They are already under emotional strain from their circumstances or case
- Don't know (*exclusive, unticks other options if chosen*)
- Other - please specify (*text box*)

Q27 – Your notes

Section 10: Learning from complaints and feedback

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Q28

Does your firm use any of the following relating to complaints?

(Multiple select)

- Data published by the Solicitors Regulation Authority
- Resources/guidance produced by Solicitors Regulation Authority
- Data published by the Legal Ombudsman
- Resources/guidance produced by the Legal Ombudsman
- Data published by the Legal Services Consumer Panel
- No, none of these (*exclusive, unticks other options if chosen*)
- Other - please specify (*text box*)

Q28 – Your notes

Section 11: Other feedback

Q29

Are there any other key points about the complaints process that you would like to make, that this questionnaire has not covered?

For example, are there any areas where you would like more clarity on the expectations on firms or additional resources you would find useful to support complaint handling in your firm?

(Long text box)

Q29 – Your notes

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Q30

What position(s) do you hold in your firm?

(Multiple select)

- Sole principal
- Partner/director
- Compliance officer for legal practice (COLP)
- Compliance Officer for Finance and Administration (COFA)
- Complaints handling partner
- Employee (other)
- Other - please specify (*text box*)

Q30 – Your notes

Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to provide this information. Your answers are important to us in understanding how firms deal with complaints.

We will not accept responses submitted using this form.
You must complete the online form