

# Education Department Policy

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Title	Guidelines for dealing with customer complaints and concerns
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## 1. Overview

This policy has been introduced to ensure complaints and concerns are dealt with quickly and fairly by:

- ensuring our procedures are easily accessible, well publicised, and simple to use;
- maintaining the confidentiality of both staff and customers at all times;
- adhering to established time limits for action, keeping people informed of progress;
- effectively addressing all points raised, and responding appropriately;
- providing information to management so that services can be improved;
- being fair, with full and objective investigation procedures.

The policy is designed to provide helpful practical advice that can be applied consistently across all services to resolve problems at the earliest opportunity. It includes guidance to help employees manage situations in which they may be subjected to unacceptable behaviour from customers.

For the purpose of this guidance, any individual to whom a service is provided is considered a customer. The principles also apply to States of Jersey employees receiving a service from another member of staff.

Providing a high standard of service is **critical** to what we do. To ensure that we maintain high standards it is important that we put the user at the heart of all our services; whether it be a compliment, concern or just a general comment the Education Department welcomes feedback from all service users.

This policy does not replace complaints procedures in schools or departments, but is to support what is already in place.

Further information and guidance is published on [www.gov.je](http://www.gov.je) at [raising a concern](#)

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to all complaints and concerns directed at Education Department staff.

The supporting documents and general guidance covers all Education Department services, including schools, the Youth Service and the Library.

## 3. Responsibilities and distribution

Senior managers and head teachers are responsible for distributing this policy to their staff and ensuring that the principles laid out within it are understood and followed.

## 4. Policy/Standards

### Rules to remember when listening to a concern

- ask no leading questions;
- err on the side of caution;
- elicit just as much information as you need in order to ascertain that there is an issue which needs following up.

### Record Keeping – Serious Complaints

For serious complaints, or legal action, all actions taken by Education Department staff must be recorded. An accurate and factual record of each incident should be made by the initial staff member involved and any witnesses. This may be important for the protection of staff or witnesses in any later enquiry or court case.

Information recorded should include the nature of the incident, the timings of all calls logged with the police / parents or other agencies. In addition to this detailed chronology, every action taken by Education Department staff must be documented. **Records should be securely retained with restricted access only, in accordance with the Data Protection (Jersey) Law 2005.**

### Contact with the media must be via the Education Department

If there is likely to be media interest in a particular case, Head Teachers and Senior Managers should contact the Education Department. The Head of Communications will then coordinate a consistent response. Staff should not liaise directly with the media as all media communications are managed by the Education Department.

### Risk of significant harm

If there is concern that a pupil, young person or family member is at a risk of significant harm a referral should be made to either the Designated Safeguarding Officer in the Education Support Team, through the Children's Service or the Youth Service through the appropriate Area Youth Officer. Or the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub 'MASH' (tel. 449217).

## 5. Managing unacceptable customer behaviour

### Unacceptable or unreasonable behaviour

Unacceptable behaviour directed towards Education Department staff may include the following:

- aggressive or abusive behaviour (examples include threats, physical violence, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks and rudeness, inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations);
- persistently making the same complaint, despite the matter having been fully addressed / investigated under the complaints procedure, or seeking an unrealistic outcome with intent to persist until the desired outcome is achieved;
- repeating complaints about a previous or historical matter that cannot be undone or remedied;
- repeatedly changing the nature or focus of a complaint or the desired outcome, part way through an investigation or after a formal response has been provided.

## **Measures to prevent unacceptable behaviour or violence at work**

Clear standards are set out in this policy to ensure that:

- services meet the expectations of customers and are delivered in a manner that is professional, courteous and timely.
- complaints are handled efficiently and effectively and, wherever possible, resolved to the customer's satisfaction

The Education Department's information and advice about complaints and concerns enables customers, including parents and carers of pupils, to exercise their right to make a complaint when they consider their expectations have not been met. The expectation is that effective management of customer complaints will reduce the likelihood of unacceptable behaviour towards department staff.

The States of Jersey's Health and Safety Policy also provides guidance for employees on preventative and protective measures that they can adopt to ensure their safety when interacting with customers, whether on States premises or in the community. This includes work with vulnerable client groups and/ or lone working.

### **What to do if a customer becomes aggressive**

When registering a complaint, customers may become frustrated or upset. Aggressive or abusive behaviour is clearly unacceptable; however an attempt to understand the issue from the customer's perspective and to show empathy may help to diffuse a potentially escalating situation.

If an employee is not able to diffuse the situation or if a customer fails to moderate their behaviour when asked, it would be appropriate to terminate the discussion, interview or telephone conversation. The customer should be advised that their complaint will be addressed but that their behaviour must be modified during any future contact with the department.

### **Strategies to help diffuse a situation where a customer becomes abusive or aggressive**

In line with the States of Jersey's Managing Unacceptable Behaviour Policy, the department's complaint's procedure and the States of Jersey's Health and Safety Policy, the following strategies could be employed:

- acknowledge the customer's disappointment with the service they have received;
- reassure the customer that their complaint will be addressed;
- explain the complaints procedure and how their complaint will be handled;
- confirm what steps will be taken and the timescales the customer can expect;
- advise the customer that their behaviour is unacceptable and must stop;
- remain calm and in control of the situation.

### **Terminating an interview/telephone conversation with a customer**

If a customer is behaving in an aggressive or abusive manner and fails to modify their behaviour when requested, it is appropriate to politely terminate the interview/telephone call.

If there is a risk to personal safety or the safety of others it would be appropriate to terminate the interview/telephone call immediately.

### **Disciplinary action for terminating a customer interview or telephone conversation**

If you feel threatened or uncomfortable when involved in a one-to-one interview or telephone conversation with a customer then you have the right to decide to advise the customer that their behaviour is unacceptable and end the interview/call if that behaviour continues. You will not be disciplined for doing so, but you should report the matter to your line manager as soon as possible.

## **You have been threatened /assaulted by a customer and want to press charges**

When a customer has been threatening and/or violent towards an employee, the department will support that employee in reporting the matter to the Police if they wish to do so.

## **Strategies to help deal with customers who repeatedly display unacceptable behaviour**

Where a complainant's actions adversely affect the ability to work and provide a service to others, it may be necessary to restrict that person's contact with the department / school. Wherever possible, this should be undertaken in a way that allows a complaint to be fully addressed through the complaints process.

Contact could be restricted to telephone or email rather than in person. In extreme situations, a complainant will be told in writing that their name is on a '*no personal contact*' list. This means that contact with the department / school will be restricted to either written communication or through a third party.

The threat of use of physical violence, verbal abuse or harassment towards Education Department staff is likely to result in the ending of all direct contact with the complainant. Incidents may be reported to the police. This will always be the case if physical violence is used or threatened.

Correspondence that is abusive to department staff or contains allegations that lack substantive evidence will not be progressed. Complainants will be:

- told that their language is considered offensive, unnecessary and unhelpful;
- asked to stop using such language;
- informed that there will be no response to their correspondence if they persist in this.

They may also be informed that future contact may have to be channeled through a third party.

Where a complainant repeatedly phones, visits the department / school / services' premises, sends irrelevant documents or continues to raise the same issues, the following actions may be taken:

- only take telephone calls from the complainant at set times on set days or put an arrangement in place for only one employee to deal with calls or correspondence from the complainant in the future;
- require the complainant to make an appointment to see a named employee before visiting the department's premises;
- require the complainant to make contact in writing only;
- return the documents to the complainant or, in extreme cases, advise the complainant that further irrelevant documents will be destroyed;
- take other action considered appropriate. However, the complainant will always be told what action was being taken and why.

## **What to do if you have done all you can to resolve a complaint, but the customer is not satisfied and insists further action be taken**

Complainant action may be considered unreasonably persistent if the complaints procedure has been exhausted and complainant continues to dispute the decision relating to their complaint.

The complainant may be told that:

- no future phone calls will be accepted or interviews / one-to-one discussions granted concerning this complaint;
- future contact by the complainant on this issue will be required in writing;
- future correspondence will be read and filed, but only acknowledged or responded to if the complainant has provided significant new information relating to the complaint.

## **Banning abusive or aggressive customers from Education Department premises**

Decisions to restrict contact will only be taken after careful consideration of the situation by the appropriate member of staff e.g. Head Teacher, Principal Youth Officer. Wherever possible, the complainant will be given the opportunity to modify their behaviour or action before a decision to restrict contact is taken.

### Unacceptable behaviour reporting

Unacceptable behaviour by a customer should be reported to your line manager.

## 5. Further information and related documents

Further information about raising a concern is available from gov.je

[Raising a concern \(gov.je\)](#)

The Department's policies on and associated legislation about the subjects below may be of use:

 [Download Child Protection Policy \(size 160 kb\)](#)

 [Download Dealing with Allegations Against Staff and Volunteers \(size 641kb\)](#)

Education Department's policies are published at [www.gov.je/EducationPolicies](http://www.gov.je/EducationPolicies)

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