

DETERMINING SERIOUSNESS OF COMPLAINTS

Complexity definitions

One approach is to identify three categories of complaint complexity: **simple**, **intermediate** and **complex**.

1) Simple

- **Simple and straight forward**

Organisations and complainant are able to provide information to each other and deal with the issues themselves – ie, direct resolution without assistance from the complaint handler other than advice and information.

- **Early resolution**

Staff need to provide information and explanations to parties, gather information for the parties, prepare simple closure letters and facilitate an expedient resolution.

2) Intermediate

The complaint issues may be moderately complex. Staff need to obtain information from a variety of sources, or deal with significant demands from complainants or opposition from people or organisations the subject of complaint.

3) Complex

The complaint involves a number of issues and/or a number of parties. The complaint process require formal information gathering, involve complex negotiations with parties, or dealing with significant personal problems of complainants, or the preparation of formal reports of findings. Some possible contributors to complexity include:

- number of organisations complained against or involved
- whether single or multiple incidents/actions/decisions
- number of issues raised in the complaint
- significance of the issues raised in the complaint
- level of technical complexity of the issues raised in the allegations
- the degree to which the relevant considerations, actions or decisions are documented
- implications for the subjects of complaint if the complaint is substantiated
- the complainant's ability to understand the issues and any explanation provided (eg, lack of education, basic ability to understand, language barriers, etc).

Seriousness definitions

Complaint seriousness can be divided into three categories:

1) Low

- **Trivial**

Trivial, vexatious, misconceived, not made in good faith.

- **Without substance**

On its face, the complaint is clearly without substance or based on a misunderstanding.

- **Minor**

Complaint could/should have been resolved easily without complaint handler support.

2) Medium

- **Routine**

Legitimate complaints, especially about communication, practice, procedure or policy, but causing no significant or lasting detriment [could be low or medium depending on the degree of seriousness].

3) High

- **Substantial**

Complaint raises significant issues of standards, level of customer service, competence, professionalism, or denial of rights.

- **Serious**

Complaint raises significant issue of public safety or public interest, or there has been a serious adverse outcome grossly substandard behaviour, including misconduct.