



## Cause for Complaint?

How charities manage complaints about their services



The Charity Commission is the independent regulator for charitable activity. This is one of a series of reports that present our case-working experience, supplemented by additional research. Their purpose is to help increase understanding of an issue. They are part of our mission to help charities maximise their impact, comply with their legal obligations, encourage innovation and enhance effectiveness.

This report presents the findings of our research into charities' working practices and contains ideas you may wish to consider adopting, taking into account your charity's own unique situation.

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# Introduction

Charities exist to create a better society and depend on people more than any other resource. People provide charities with funding and support. People act as volunteers, staff and users. A charity's relationship with people is a crucial part of its make-up.

Well-governed charities provide good-quality services that meet the needs of those they serve. They are also open and transparent about the charity's governance so that they engender the trust and confidence of their users, wider stakeholders and the general public.

This report presents the findings of our research into one aspect of charities' customer service: the extent and quality of charities' management of complaints about the services they provide. The research focused on how charities deal with complaints by, or on behalf of, users of their services when things go wrong. We found that an effective complaints management system is a proven way of maintaining and building relationships with the people on whom the charity depends.

Many charities we spoke to during our research for this report assumed that problems arising from the services they provide could be dealt with amicably, using common sense. And indeed in some cases this is true. But our research has shown that serious complaints are often unexpected and that managing complaints can be stressful and time consuming for all involved. We found that having a procedure to follow minimises stress and reduces the time it takes to manage a complaint. It also protects charities against the worst excesses of unreasonable or vexatious complaints.

Others in the sector have also called for charities to recognise their responsibility for dealing with complaints transparently and effectively. For instance, the national Code of Governance for the Voluntary and Community Sector was launched in June 2005.

This said that charities should have "a procedure for dealing with feedback and complaints from stakeholders, staff, volunteers and the public"<sup>1</sup>. Even the smallest charities were advised to "set up fair ways of dealing with complaints and disputes. Make sure everyone knows about the procedures and how to use them"<sup>2</sup>.

The Charity Commission's Independent Complaints Reviewer has also recognised complaints management as an area of concern in her recent Annual Reports<sup>3</sup>.

One of the purposes of this report therefore is to raise awareness among charities and the public of charities' – and the Commission's – roles in complaints handling. We also aim to share examples of best practice in complaints management, to help others improve and increase consistency in this area throughout the charitable sector.

Our research showed that for complaints to be managed effectively, everyone working in a charity needs to know about the procedure for managing complaints and about their role in that procedure. This report is therefore aimed at all trustees, staff and volunteers in the charitable sector. We illustrate, with best-practice examples from our research and our casework, how a complaints procedure that is proportionate to the size and nature of the charity can:

- assist in dealing with difficult complaints and therefore be resource-effective; and
- demonstrate that the charity operates openly and transparently and is accountable to its users, other stakeholders and the public in general.

1 *Good Governance: A Code for the Voluntary and Community Sector*, ACEVO, Charity Trustee Networks, ICSEA, NCVO on behalf of The National Hub of Expertise in Governance, First Edition, June 2005.

2 *Learning to fly: Piloting your local voluntary or community organisation*, The National Hub of Expertise in Governance, June 2005.

3 *Seeking a Fair Resolution*, Charity Commission's Independent Complaints Reviewer, Annual Reports 2003/04 and 2004/05.

# Executive summary

Effective governance of charities is a key factor in maintaining and improving public confidence in the sector. One area that charities have told us they find difficult is managing complaints made to them about the services they provide to their users.

30% of charities responding to our survey<sup>4</sup> in 2005 had a complaints procedure. Of those charities with such a complaints procedure, almost two-thirds view it as being an asset: 63% said it was beneficial or very beneficial. Nobody felt that having a procedure was in any way detrimental to the charity.

Charities told us a complaints procedure can bring a range of benefits, including, crucially, strengthening their capacity to deliver good-quality services and building the trust of their users, stakeholders and the wider public. Among the advantages we were told about, it emerged that an effective complaints procedure which is well publicised, accessible to those who wish to use it and well managed in its implementation is likely to:

- **Empower** users by instilling confidence in them and giving them more influence over the charity and the way it operates. It also enables the charity to show that it is focusing on the users' needs.
- **Help** to promote the charity well to the public by showing it is responsible and accountable. It enables the charity to demonstrate that it has an open, fair and honest approach.
- **Save** charities time and effort by enabling problems or concerns to be tackled early. It can minimise the adverse effects of things that go wrong and reduce the chances of problems escalating. It can also head off future complaints.
- **Benefit** charities' development by, for example, providing valuable information on their services. It has helped charities measure the quality of their services and given trustees and staff an opportunity to monitor and improve them. It has also helped charities to find ways of being more responsive to unmet needs.
- **Enhance** the charity's reputation by helping communication, showing a caring approach, helping to foster a good reputation for customer service and confirming the charity's commitment to excellence.

## Key features of a procedure

Because of the diversity of the sector, there can be no 'one size fits all' approach to setting up a complaints procedure. But our research identified a number of key features which charities told us go toward ensuring that a complaints procedure benefits the charity, its users and wider stakeholders in the ways mentioned above. These include:

### Ensuring that a complaint is recognised as a complaint

- An effective charity will have a clear definition of what it will regard as a complaint. People will not always state overtly that they are making a complaint. A good procedure will help a charity to recognise, acknowledge and explore the reasons for any expression of dissatisfaction, whether or not these turn out to be justified.

### Ensuring accountability for the services a charity provides

- In a changing climate, increasing numbers of charities are providing, or are considering providing, service in partnership with local, regional or national government. Where charities are operating in partnership with any other body in delivering services, there should be clarity about who is accountable, so that it is clear to service users who they can complain to.
- All staff and volunteers who may receive or deal with complaints need to receive adequate training in complaints handling. This could include advice on how to resolve issues.
- Charities will benefit from encouraging all volunteers and staff to recognise the advantages of implementing the complaints procedure. Responsibility for and ownership of complaints management will ideally be stated in the job descriptions of all volunteers (including trustees) and staff.
- Where possible, within larger organisations, implementation of the complaints procedure will be integrated with other cross-cutting systems such as quality assurance and staff training.

<sup>4</sup> Please see *Annex B* for full survey findings.

### Ensuring support for all those involved in complaints and their management

- Support needs to be made available for both complainants and those complained about. Making a complaint can be stressful, tiring and time-consuming; equally, being the focus of a complaint can be stressful, upsetting and anxiety-provoking.
- Support also needs to be available for organisations managing complaints. At present this is provided, for voluntary sector organisations, by the Charity Complaints Forum<sup>5</sup>. Some voluntary sector organisations also get support from their umbrella body, parent organisation, partner agency or local CVS.

### Ensuring the complaints procedure is accessible to those who may want to use it

- A charity will know and understand the needs of its users. Consideration of those needs will help decide how it should best portray the procedure; for example translating it into community languages or Braille, or providing extra support for people with communication difficulties or learning disabilities.
- The procedure needs to be adequately publicised so that anyone who may wish to use it is aware of its existence and the way in which it can be accessed.

### Ensuring complaints are managed effectively

- We found that, ideally, complaints will be dealt with locally wherever possible. Our research, and our own experience of dealing with complaints about the services we provide, shows that complaints can often be managed most effectively where they have first arisen.
- Ensuring consistency in the way complaints are managed is important. Our research showed that this can be mainly an issue for large and very large charities; but equally smaller charities can find that factors such as the personalities involved can affect the way two different complaints are dealt with.
- Charities will find a multi-stage procedure, with the stages appropriate to the size and structure of the charity, helpful. In a very small charity there may be just two stages, for example, the trustees and then an independent organisation such as the local CVS. In a very large charity, there may be as many as five stages.
- It is useful to build into the procedure the use of an independent person or organisation, whether formally or informally.

- A swift response, acknowledging the complaint and telling the complainant how and when the charity will deal with their complaint with clear and realistic timescales will help manage the complainant's expectations.
- It helps to ask the complainant, at the earliest possible stage, what they want as an outcome of their complaint; and provide this wherever possible and appropriate. If it is not possible, or it is inappropriate, to provide their desired outcome, offer an outcome that seems to be proportionate to their complaint.
- It is important to know where and how to stop when a complaint has become unhelpful to the complainant and the organisation. A small number of people find it difficult to stop complaining. A complaints procedure can help demonstrate that the charity has taken all reasonable steps to deal with the complaint fairly and is justified in taking no further action.

### Ensuring the charity benefits by learning from complaints

- Charities told us that one of the main benefits of having a procedure comes from analysing and learning lessons from the complaints they receive. This requires a robust system for recording the number of complaints received and what they are about. Complaints can be analysed and information published about the number, nature and outcome. A charity can then use this information to reflect on and improve its services.
- Organisations may also seek feedback from complainants about their experience of the complaints system, communicate learning points throughout the organisation and use these to improve complaints management.
- It is beneficial to review the procedure regularly, in the light of issues arising in its implementation in particular and changes to best practice in complaints management in general.

The *Findings* and *Annexes* sections of this report give full details of the results of our research. In the light of these findings, we believe that all trustees should consider whether their charity should have a complaints procedure in place; and if so what type of procedure is best suited to the charity, its service users and wider stakeholders.

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<sup>5</sup> The Charity Complaints Forum was set up to share best practice and assist in complaints management across the sector. For more details see *Annex D*.

## 1. Responsibility for complaints management

### Key finding

- 77% of interviewees from small- and medium-sized charities thought, incorrectly, that the Charity Commission is responsible for helping to advise on, manage and resolve difficult complaints about services provided by charities.

Charities exist to create a better society and to do their best for their beneficiaries. But from time to time, a charity and its users may find themselves at odds over the service it provides. There may be an actual or perceived problem which, in the interests of transparency and good customer service, the charity will need to deal with.

We know that people often become involved with charities because they are in need or because they feel strongly about something. When things go wrong in these situations, feelings can run high. At such times it can be difficult for anyone to be seen to make fair judgements without there being a procedure to refer to. Our research has found that a complaints procedure will help a charity to manage everyone's expectations and to know when to stop a complaint going further.

For the purposes of this report, we define a **complaints procedure** or a **complaints management system** as:

- a formal document agreed by the trustees that outlines the series of actions and the manner in which they will be conducted (including for example the steps and timescales involved) in the investigation of a complaint; or
- an informally agreed procedure for the way in which a charity will deal with complaints it receives about its services. It may be recorded, for example, in the minutes of the meeting at which it was agreed.

### a. The Charity Commission's role

*"I'd advise you to contact the Charity Commission; there'll be a bloke in an office there who spends an hour a day sorting these things out."*

Interviewee from a small charity

Our research found that, when things do go wrong, many still believe that the Charity Commission can and should sort things out. But this is not always the case. Our powers to intervene are limited by several factors including:

- the restrictions of the law;
- the often wide leeway given to trustees by the charity's governing document; and
- considerations over whether it would be proportionate and in the charity's best interests for us to get involved.

Many complaints about the Commission that reach our Independent Complaints Reviewer come from users dissatisfied with our response to their complaints about a service they have received from a charity. Such complaints are of great significance to the individuals concerned, but we have no 'ombudsman'<sup>6</sup> powers to adjudicate on them.

We found a general lack of awareness of our role in this area among members of the public and, worryingly, among charities themselves. In particular,

77% of interviewees from small- and medium-sized charities thought – incorrectly – that we were responsible for helping to advise on, manage and resolve difficult complaints. In fact, we cannot take up complaints about a charity's standard of service in an individual case.

The law forbids the Commission from getting involved in a charity's administration unless we decide that there is some grave general risk to the charity's interests. If the charity trustees are acting in accordance with the law and their governing document, we cannot get involved.

If there is no evidence of wrongdoing or the issues are not in our view sufficiently serious, we are likely to decide that regulatory action would be disproportionate. We cannot act on unsubstantiated allegations, rumour or opinion – to do this and disrupt the charity's work would be unfair to that charity, its work and more importantly, its users.

#### Examples of complaints the Charity Commission cannot get involved with:

- Standards of goods or pricing in charity shops.
- A grant-maker refuses a grant to an individual.
- A charity changes its services, for example by closing one of its residential homes.
- An animal adopted from a charity develops a health problem.
- A charity refuses information about how a particular donation has been spent.

<sup>6</sup> An ombudsman is an official appointed to investigate individuals' complaints about an organisation's administration, especially that of public authorities – for more information, please see section on the *Possible role of an ombudsman* and *Annex C*.



## Case study

*This case study is an example of a complaint that the Commission could not get involved with.*

The charity is a medium-sized<sup>7</sup> charity established for the relief of suffering to animals. The Commission received a complaint that the charity was not operating in accordance with its governing document and this was affecting the welfare of the animals under its care. Our enquiries found that the charity had been forced to re-house the animals because of problems with the original building. The trustees were able to show they were trying to find other premises but had not yet found anything suitable. We told the complainant we were satisfied that the charity was acting appropriately.

However, the complainant remained dissatisfied and repeatedly wrote to the Commission that the charity was not actively trying to find a property and also raised concerns that the animals were not being treated as well as they should. The Commission confirmed that we had no role to play in welfare and advised the complainant to take such concerns to the appropriate organisation, in this case the RSPCA. We also recommended that the complainant contact the charity direct to try and resolve matters face to face.

Nor can we act as mediator when the complaint centres on a breakdown of relations between the charity and a complainant. Above all, our powers are to be used to protect the **charity** and its assets. And where we do get involved, our interest is not in apportioning blame or punishing 'wrongdoers', but in setting the charity on the right track so that it can move forward.

Moreover, the Commission has limited resources. Our experienced caseworkers measure each case on its merits and, if we decide that our intervention would

be disproportionate, we will not intervene. If we receive a complaint about a charity's service, we will usually say that we have no role and explain that the complaint should be dealt with by the charity's own complaints procedure. So it is in charities' best interests to have a procedure for dealing with dissatisfied customers in a structured and manageable way.

For further information on the Charity Commission's role in handling complaints, see our publication *Complaints About Charities*<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> We have described charities as "small", "medium", "large" or "very large" according to their income band (see the table in *Annex B* for more information). This is purely for our research purposes and in no way reflects the standing of the charity concerned or makes a judgement on its impact in its own community.

<sup>8</sup> *Complaints About Charities* (CC47).

## b. The trustees' role

Whether a charity is a small, local community concern or a household name, the trustees are ultimately responsible for its management and administration, including the management of complaints. Only a minority of the people we spoke to from small or medium-sized charities understood that the responsibility for the handling of individual complaints about services rests wholly with the trustees.

One of the hallmarks of an effective charity is that it will generally be accountable and transparent and, in particular, that it 'welcomes both positive and challenging feedback from its stakeholders and has well-publicised, effective and timely procedures for dealing with complaints about the charity and its activities. These explain rights to complain and appeal and give details of the process and likely timescales.'<sup>9</sup>

In larger charities, part of the work needed to fulfil the trustees' responsibilities may be delegated to staff. In smaller charities this may not be an option, so the trustees must do the work themselves. At times this can seem a burden.

Our research found that almost 70% of charities surveyed, across the four income bands<sup>10</sup>, lack a complaints procedure. The majority we interviewed also lacked any form of complaints management system. Our extensive caseworking experience shows that some complainants are unhappy with the response they receive from charities, but have nowhere else to complain except the courts – which is expensive and time-consuming. In time, this gap may be filled by the appointment of a Charity Ombudsman (see section on *Possible role of an ombudsman* for further details).

In the meantime, our research showed that charities find benefit in developing a good procedure for handling complaints which will meet their needs. This is therefore one of our main recommendations arising from our research for this report. Having such a procedure can help the charity in two ways: first, it can lessen the burden on trustees of dealing with complaints; and second, complaints can help improve the charity's performance.

Further information about organisations that can help in pursuing and managing complaints is given in *Annex D*.

### Resources

The Charity Commission's **Independent Complaints Reviewer** produces annual reports called *Seeking a Fair Resolution*. These are available on her website at [www.icrev.demon.co.uk](http://www.icrev.demon.co.uk)

***Complaints About Charities*** (CC47) explains what to do if someone suspects something is wrong with a charity, what cases we can and cannot deal with and our powers to investigate and put matters right.

The ***Hallmarks of an Effective Charity*** (CC60) sets out the principles that our regulation aims to protect and promote and the standards an effective charity and its trustees aspire to. The publication is mainly designed for charities with an annual income of £250,000 and above.

Contact details for the **Charity Commission** are in *Annex D*.

<sup>9</sup> *The Hallmarks of an Effective Charity* (CC60) sets out the principles that our regulation aims to protect and promote and the standards an effective charity and its trustees should aspire to. The publication is mainly designed for charities with an annual income of £250,000 and above. For more details see [www.charitycommission.gov.uk](http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk)

<sup>10</sup> We split the sample for our survey into four income bands. The sizes of each income band are in *Annex B*.

## 2. Scale and cost of complaints and their management

### Key findings

- Almost a third (30%) of charities responding to our survey have a complaints procedure; the type of charity plays as much a part in whether it is likely to have a procedure as its size.
- Two-thirds of charities with a procedure had not received any complaints over the previous 12 months.
- Complaints management is not expensive in direct financial terms, but can have hidden time costs.

#### a. Scale of complaints in the sector

Our survey showed that, in practical terms, the volume of complaints received by charities does not appear to be great. For example, about two-thirds of charities with complaints procedures said they had not received any complaints in the previous 12 months. And only just over a quarter had received between one and five complaints.

One in 20 (5%) charities had received over five complaints and they were all large or very large charities. Of these, only four charities (1.2%) reported receiving over 50 complaints in the last year.

However, when we spoke to individual charities as part of our research, this raised questions about whether some charities, especially those without a procedure, were in fact open to receiving concerns or complaints from people.

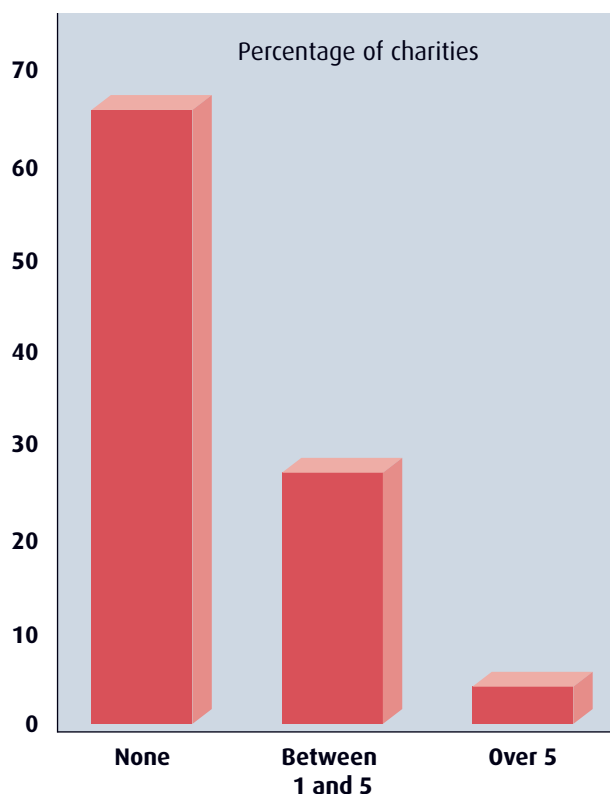
A complaint may be made without an overt statement that it is a complaint. A charity should recognise and acknowledge any expression of dissatisfaction as a potential complaint.

*“It isn’t for the organisation to decide whether the person has a complaint. If I’m the service user or the consumer and I think I’m complaining, I undoubtedly am...”*

Charity Commission’s Independent Complaints Reviewer

For the purposes of this report, we define a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction about the standards of service provided by a charity, which an individual or a group of users claim has affected him, her or them. To help the charity and its users identify when somebody is making a complaint, we suggest that the trustees write their own definition. Any definition will be most useful if it is clearly written in plain language.

Number of complaints received in the last year<sup>11</sup>



11 The figures on which this graph is based do not add up to 100% because 1.2% of respondents said “don’t know” or did not answer.

## b. What sort of complaints procedure?

Our research shows that a complaints procedure that is proportionate to the charity's size and nature is an important part of an effective charity. It can:

- help deal with difficult complaints and thereby be resource effective; and
- show that the charity operates transparently and openly and is accountable to its users, stakeholders and the public in general.

We found that there can be no 'one size fits all' approach to the use of complaints procedures by charities and that the way a charity manages the complaints it receives will depend on many factors. This is not surprising, as the sector is so large and diverse.

We understand that all the best-practice guidance in the world cannot prepare for every eventuality. Nor is it helpful for trustees simply to copy another organisation's complaints procedure word for word and expect it to benefit their charity.

However, based on the benefits we found of dealing with complaints in a structured and disciplined way, our advice is that most charities will benefit from drawing up a complaints procedure of some kind – reflecting the needs of their users or clients – and taking steps to ensure that all the relevant people know about and use it.

This does not mean that every charity has to have a formal written complaints procedure. For a small charity it might be as simple as, for example, a statement at the Annual General Meeting that any complaints are to be directed to the Chair of the Trustees. So long as it is clear, accessible and widely communicated, it can benefit both the charity and its users.

All trustees should consider the needs of their charity and its users and then decide on a procedure that is appropriate to its size and type.

## Case study

*This case study focuses on a charity that has adopted a multi-stage process.*

Cherry Kids Club in East Anglia is a medium-sized<sup>12</sup> charity that operates an after-school club for children between the ages of four and 12.

The charity's complaints procedure is easily accessible both to parents and staff and operates on three levels. Complaints can be made verbally or in writing. When a complaint is initially made it is generally dealt with by a member of staff. If it cannot be resolved satisfactorily, it is referred to the management committee for investigation.

The charity's policy sets down a timescale in responding to complaints and also options for redress. After assessing the complaint the management committee is responsible for implementing any follow-up action and then conveying the decision in writing to the complainant. If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the decision, they can move to the third stage of the procedure which involves an impartial and mutually agreed arbitrator.

The charity considers a multi-layered complaints policy appropriate to its particular needs. Stating it on the charity's website gives greater transparency and accountability to its users and other stakeholders.

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<sup>12</sup> We have described charities as "small", "medium", "large" or "very large" according to their income band (see the table in *Annex B* for more information). This is purely for our research purposes and in no way reflects the standing of the charity concerned or makes a judgement on its impact in its own community.

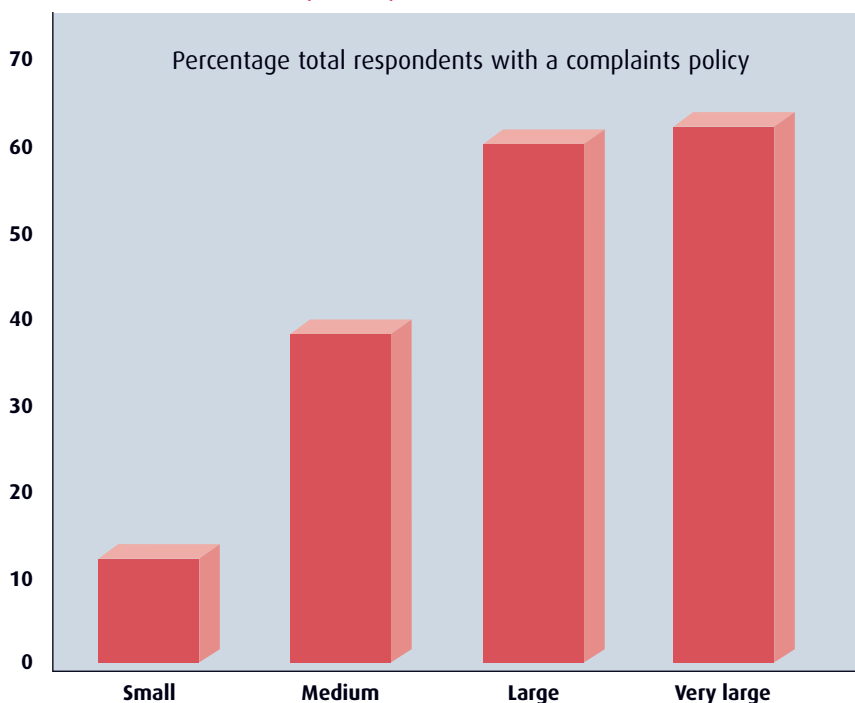
### c. Which charities have a procedure?

Our survey asked charities whether or not they had a complaints procedure. Overall, 30% of charities said that they did. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the likelihood of a charity having a complaints procedure increases with its size. Only 12% of small charities surveyed said they had one, compared with over 60% of large and very large charities.

However, our research also showed that three types of charity have specific distinguishing features with respect to complaints procedures. These are:

- charities affected by particular legislation or regulation such as those working with children and young people;
- charities providing only financial assistance; and
- charities providing services.

#### Sizes of charities with complaints procedures



#### Charities affected by legislation or regulation

All charities must comply with not only charity law but any other legislation that may affect them because of their activities, such as employment law and contract law. Our research found that some charities, such as those working with children, are influenced by legal requirements<sup>13</sup> when considering their handling of complaints.

The Children Act 1989 introduced the idea that children who were looked after by a local authority must have access to a complaints procedure. The Courts and Legal Services Act 1990 expanded this to include all children 'in need' and children's

representatives such as parents and carers. The Children Act 2004 added that the Children's Commissioner may 'consider or research complaints procedures so far as relating to children'.

The law puts the onus on the statutory sector to create and implement the necessary complaints procedures. However, recent research<sup>14</sup> has found that different local authorities interpret the legislation differently. We know that many services for children are provided by charities on behalf of the statutory sector. Some charities that do this decide they need their own complaints procedure, while others choose to help their young users to access the local authority's procedure.

13 Namely Children Act 1989; Courts and Legal Services Act 1990; and Children Act 2004.

14 NCH Children's Charity (2003) Challenging Perspectives: *Young People's Views on the Management of their Complaints* by NCH.

Of the large and very large charities surveyed, 125 worked with children and young people. Of these, 80 (64%) had a complaints procedure and 45 (36%) did not. This shows only a very slight difference from the overall figures of 143 large and very large charities with a complaints procedure (60%) and 92 without (40%). It may be that some charities working with children and young people are relying on the complaints procedures of their statutory partners.

Whether a charity is providing a service independently of, or in connection with, a statutory partner, we recommend that it ensures that a complaints procedure is accessible to its users – no matter which party is administering it.

### Grant-makers

We found differences of opinion about whether charities that provide purely financial assistance need complaints procedures. Some people told us that because their charity does not deal directly with the public, but gives grants through an intermediary organisation such as a school or social services department, they do not need a complaints procedure. Others said they do not need one because, as they're giving money away, the only response they expect will be gratitude.

*“If it’s giving grants to individuals or organisations, if it has significant funds, then some people might say ‘oh, so and so got a grant and I didn’t, it’s not fair, it’s corrupt’. There can be too much grace and favour in giving grants out.”*

Trustee of a small local heritage charity

Our survey showed that charities lacking a complaints procedure whose main area of work was providing financial assistance were indeed significantly less likely than charities working in any other area to receive complaints. However, focusing on the appreciation of those whom a charity helps may hide the needs of people who are eligible but do not benefit.

Also, some interviewees said that grant-givers did need a complaints procedure to guard against accusations of unfairness or even, in the most serious cases, corruption. The Institute of Fundraising (IoF) points out that donors may wish to complain if they do not feel that a charity is giving them the service they expected. The IoF has launched a self-regulation scheme for charities that promotes best practice in charitable fundraising, including a complaints system for donors<sup>15</sup>.

We suggest that a complaints procedure can be as valuable to grant-making charities as any other kind of charity and can usefully show that it is accountable and transparent to the public and its beneficial class.

### Service providers

*“I would have thought a charity should have a complaints procedure if it provides services, advice, facilities or real direct benefits to service users, particularly if those service users are at risk or vulnerable for any reason.”*

Trustee of a medium-sized grant-making charity

Several interviewees thought that if a charity provided services directly it should have a complaints procedure.

As stated in *Annex C*, for the purposes of this report we defined a service as an act of help or assistance provided by a charity to an individual user or a group of users. Our survey found that those providing services are significantly more likely to have a complaints procedure than those with any other main area of work. However, almost 40% of charities providing services lacked a complaints procedure.

See the section on *Working in partnership* for further findings on service providing charities.

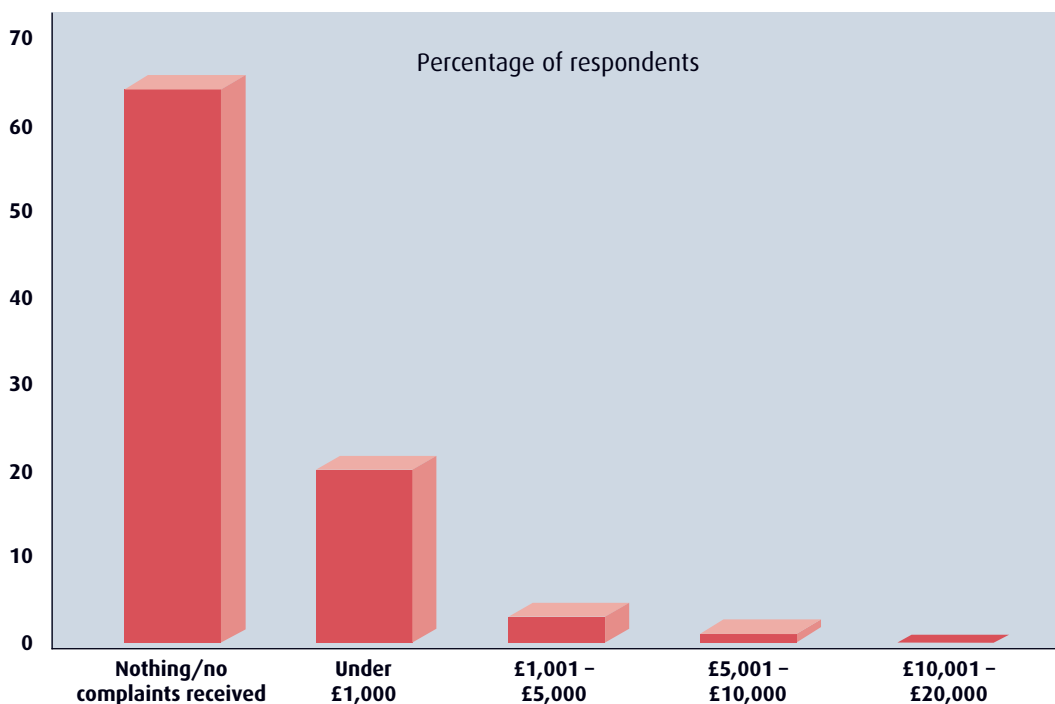
<sup>15</sup> The Institute of Fundraising is the professional body for UK fundraisers, working to promote the highest standards in fundraising practice and management. For more information please see *Annex D*.

#### d. Cost of complaints in the sector

Charities responding to our survey told us that, from their perspective, complaints management is not expensive in direct financial terms. An effective complaints procedure costs very little to implement

and our research and caseworking experience show that it tends to reduce the time spent on dealing with complaints – and therefore the overall cost of complaints management.

#### Cost of complaints management<sup>16</sup>



#### Resources

The **Institute of Fundraising** is the professional body for UK fundraisers, working to promote the highest standards in fundraising practice and management. Its website is at [www.institute-of-fundraising.org.uk](http://www.institute-of-fundraising.org.uk)

**NCH Children's Charity** publication "Challenging Perspectives" reports the findings of research into how young people see the problems they encounter in residential projects. Its website is at [www.nch.org.uk](http://www.nch.org.uk)

A number of organisations can help with producing text in plain English, for example, the **Plain Language Commission** provides accreditation with the Clear English Standard logo. Its website is at [www.clearest.co.uk](http://www.clearest.co.uk)

<sup>16</sup> The figures on which this graph is based do not add up to 100% because 5% of respondents said "don't know" and 7% did not answer.



### 3. Benefits of having a complaints procedure

#### Key findings

- 63% of survey respondents with a complaints procedure said it was beneficial or very beneficial to the charity. Nobody said it was in any way detrimental.
- Both charities and their users benefit in various ways from having a complaints procedure.

Of those charities surveyed with a complaints procedure, 63% said it was either beneficial or very beneficial to their organisation. None said it was in any way detrimental. Nobody said it wasted time or resources, or was pointless.

Anecdotal evidence from our qualitative research found a perception among some charities that having a complaints procedure is only likely to encourage complaints. However, our survey findings showed this is not always the case. And we were told that the benefits of handling complaints effectively by far outweigh any disadvantages.

#### Case study

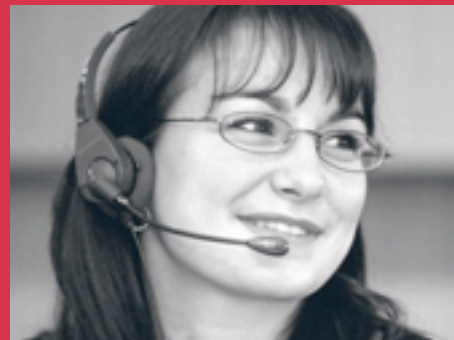
*This case study shows the benefits of having a complaints procedure to an organisation.*

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) is a very large<sup>17</sup> national charity concerned with animal welfare. Its national complaints procedure was launched in January 2004.

The charity sees the complaints procedure as a learning tool and an “early warning system” for the Society as a whole. Multiple complaints about single issues can be identified more easily, enabling a consistent approach to be applied in solving problems. The charity’s directors also play a more defined role than before by receiving regular reports about the numbers of the complaints and issues involved and obtaining feedback on specific areas of concern.

An annual review of the system showed that for it to be effective and efficient the charity needs to ensure that staff at a national and a regional level are properly trained and educated in all aspects of the procedure. The charity is currently looking at ways of improving areas that have been identified as issues for procedural and staff development.

The benefit of a single national complaints procedure has been that it enables the charity to identify areas of concern common to the charity’s five regions, allowing it to address emerging issues at a corporate level.



RSPCA

Andrew Forsyth/RSPCA

<sup>17</sup> We have described charities as “small”, “medium”, “large” or “very large” according to their income band (see the table in *Annex B* for more information). This is purely for our research purposes and in no way reflects the standing of the charity concerned or makes a judgement on its impact in its own community.

Our research uncovered a common idea among small and medium-sized charities that a complaints procedure was unnecessary because 'everyone knows who to talk to if they have a problem'. Yet it became clear during the interviews we held with charities that this assumption is not always correct. Even if the trustees or charity staff are well known, not everybody may feel able to talk to the person or people concerned. A fairer approach would be to provide a procedure that is the same for everyone.

We also found that, even with a high-quality complaints procedure, complaints management can

be very complex and challenging. Sadly, not every complaint is open to an amicable settlement. Yet many charities told us that a complaints procedure provided a degree of security against unreasonable complaints. If a charity can show it has an adequate procedure that it has followed through, then there are no grounds for anyone to demand further action against it. And if a charity gets investigated by an external regulator as a result of a complaint, its documents will show it has acted appropriately.

*“[A complaint is] an opportunity to build a relationship with a service user.”*

Focus group participant

Charities told us a complaints procedure can bring various benefits, including the following:

- It empowers users by instilling confidence in them and gives them more influence over the charity and the way it operates. It also enables the charity to show it is focusing on the users' needs.
- It can help to promote the charity well to the public by showing it is responsible and accountable. It enables the charity to show it has an open, fair and honest approach.
- It saves charities time and effort by enabling problems or concerns to be tackled early. It can minimise the adverse effects of things that go wrong and reduce the chances of problems escalating. It can also head off future complaints.
- It can help charities to develop by, for example, providing valuable information on their services. It has helped charities measure the quality of their services and given trustees and staff an opportunity to monitor and improve them. It has also helped charities to find ways of being more responsive to unmet needs.
- Finally, we have been told it has enhanced the charity's reputation by helping communication, showing a caring approach, helping to foster a good reputation for customer service and confirming the charity's commitment to excellence.

## 4. Features of complaints procedures

### Key findings

Most charities with complaints procedures demonstrate good practice by:

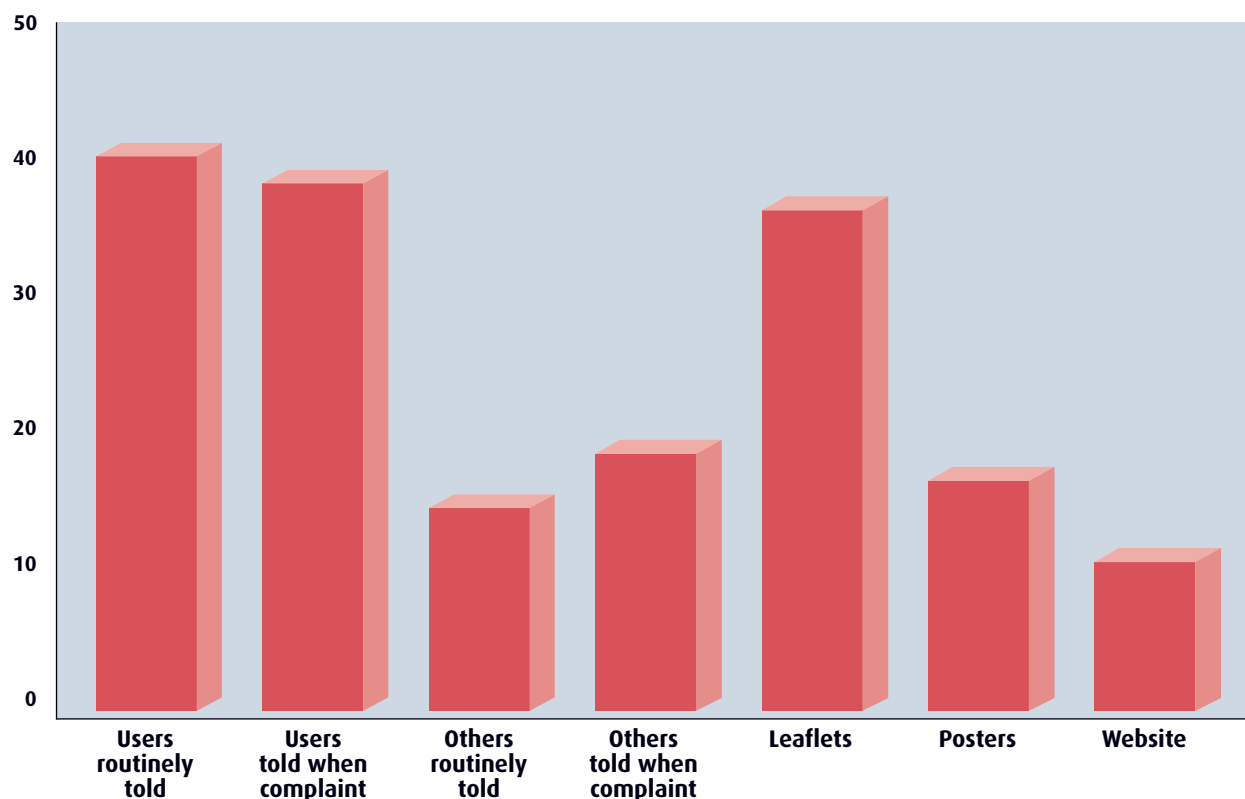
- offering more than one way for people to complain;
- publicising their procedure widely in various ways; and
- having at least two stages to their complaints procedure.

A complaints procedure will only be fully effective if charity trustees, staff and volunteers are aware of it and it is available and accessible to potential complainants. This means that the procedure itself needs to be:

- advertised openly;
- produced in a format that is readily understandable to those who may wish to use it; and
- easy for complainants to use.

#### a. Advertising the procedure

In our survey, we asked how charities with a complaints procedure let people know about it<sup>18</sup>.



<sup>18</sup> Charities could choose more than one option and so the percentages do not add up to 100%.

We were pleased that the responses to our survey showed that charities publicise their procedure in a wide variety of ways. As well as the more conventional ways, several charities told us they advertise the procedure through:

- readily available charity documents such as handbooks and booklets;
- newsletters;
- prospectuses;
- magazines;
- notice boards;
- welcome pack;
- contract/agreement with users;
- CD-Rom;
- all literature that is given out;
- during induction/admission process;
- residents' meetings.

Figures from our Register of Charities<sup>19</sup> show that 18% of all charities have a website. We suggest that if a charity does have a website, this is a useful and easily accessible place to publicise its complaints procedure for minimal cost and effort.

### Case study

*This case study is an example of how a charity dealt with a complaint.*

The ABRS Jeffress Scholarship Trust is a medium-sized<sup>20</sup> grant-making body that provides scholarships for students to train as riding instructors. Every student has a named trustee to contact in case of any problems.



ABRS Jeffress Scholarship Trust

The charity described its complaints system to us as an 'immediate action verbal system'.

Any complaint can be made verbally to any trustee, who will consider it immediately and try to resolve the problem. If the trustee is unable to do so, he or she will ask for the complaint to be put in writing and pass it to the Board for further investigation. This may be done by telephone conference, particularly if the problem is urgent, or at a full Board meeting. This ensures that the complaint is addressed in a timely way. The trustees' decision is communicated in writing to everyone involved.

On one occasion, a student said she was disappointed with the standard of training she had received and made a formal complaint to her named trustee. The trustee tried to resolve the complaint, but could not do so to the student's satisfaction. The complaint was then passed to the full trustee board which met to assess the matter. The trustees found there had been misunderstandings and faults on both sides, with communication problems and plans not fulfilled. The Board therefore decided that the complaint was to some extent justified and the student was offered generous redress in the form of a second full scholarship.

<sup>19</sup> The Register of Charities contains details of registered charities in England and Wales. We ask for charities' website addresses on each year's Annual Return form.

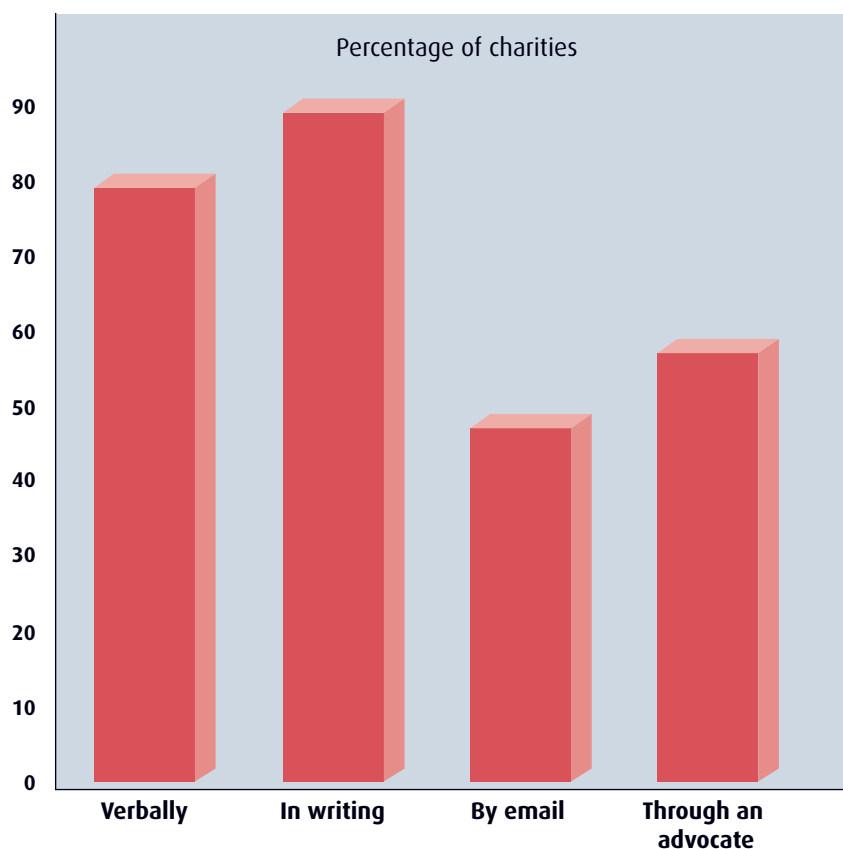
<sup>20</sup> We have described charities as "small", "medium", "large" or "very large" according to their income band (see the table in *Annex B* for more information). This is purely for our research purposes and in no way reflects the standing of the charity concerned or makes a judgement on its impact in its own community.

## b. Accessing the procedure

We asked charities to tell us how people could access their complaints procedure if they wished to. Our survey offered four ways in which people might be able to complain: verbally, in writing, via email and through an advocate to speak on their behalf. We were not surprised to find that verbal and written complaints were most common.

However, charities also told us that alternative methods of complaining increase the accessibility of complaints procedures. So we were pleased to discover that almost half of charities with a complaints procedure allow people to make complaints by email; and that over half would accept complaints made through an advocate.

### How a complaint can be made<sup>21</sup>



We also asked charities to tell us if they offered other ways for people to complain. There were many varied responses, showing that charities have really thought about making their complaints procedure easy to access. Methods included:

- by telephone;
- through a freephone number;
- by text message;
- on voicemail;
- via fax;
- through audio, video and digital video tape;
- through regularly held user forums;
- through a members' representative;
- by having a complaints box or complaints book;
- through an evaluation questionnaire; and
- by including a tear-off slip on a leaflet.

<sup>21</sup> The figures on which this graph is based add up to over 100% because some charities accept complaints by more than one method.

## Case study

*This case study looks at how a charity makes its complaints procedure accessible to a multi-cultural clientele, enabling users to integrate more quickly.*

The Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group is a medium-sized<sup>22</sup> charity which acts as a support group for asylum seekers and immigration detainees held at Gatwick Airport. The charity has a complaints

system and an information leaflet that explains what to do if you have any concerns about the service. It can be downloaded in six languages from the charity's website [www.gdwg.org.uk](http://www.gdwg.org.uk) and is also printed in 21 different languages, copies of which are available from the centre. The charity also makes its leaflet available on the website to family members and friends of those detained who want more information about the centre.

The charity has been the subject of several press articles, usually concentrating on the experiences of individuals. It is evident that making the information available in a person's first language shows that the group is receptive to users' needs and encourages them to feel that the charity is supporting them.



Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group

We found that 83% of charities with a procedure supply it in written English, while 8% offer it in other languages and 5% in other formats (for example in Braille or in pictorial format).

Recent research by the Department for Education and Skills has found that up to seven million adults in England and Wales have literacy levels below those expected of an average 11-year-old and that around four million people do not speak English as their first language<sup>23</sup>. The RNIB says that over two million people in the UK have sight problems<sup>24</sup>. And the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities

estimates that there are up to two million people in the UK with learning disabilities<sup>25</sup>.

Clearly, it would be disproportionate for a charity to make its procedure available in every conceivable format and language. However, the charity trustees and staff will know and understand the needs of their existing and potential users better than anyone. So, as a matter of good practice, they may find it beneficial to consider from time to time whether their procedure is suitably user-friendly to all who may wish to use of it.

22 We have described charities as "small", "medium", "large" or "very large" according to their income band (see the table in *Annex B* for more information). This is purely for our research purposes and in no way reflects the standing of the charity concerned or makes a judgement on its impact in its own community.

23 [www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus)

24 [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

25 [www.learningdisabilities.org.uk](http://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk)

## 5. Practical management of complaints

### Key findings

- 38% of charities can refer complainants to an impartial person or organisation.
- Redress for successful complainants is more likely to be in the form of an apology, or a promise to make sure that the problem is not repeated, or both.
- Only 16% of charities surveyed had given financial compensation.

#### a. Timescales

Our survey found that only half of charities with a complaints procedure have a set timescale for their procedure. A realistic timescale can help to manage people's expectations. What is realistic will depend on the size and type of the charity. A small charity with no employees whose trustees meet only twice a year, for example, may be more justified in setting a longer timescale for dealing with a complaint than a large charity.

Whatever the charity's timescale, it should be made clear to complainants so that they understand what to expect. In our experience, it is good practice to acknowledge complaints quickly and, when doing so, to be clear about how and when a full response will be made. If the process is delayed for any reason, complainants can reasonably expect to be told why and given a new date by which they can expect a response.

#### b. Providing support for those involved

As we mentioned above, the direct cost of complaints management is not great. However, we found that there can be significant hidden costs, particularly in time and the need for support. For example, a volunteer or staff member who is complained about may need support. A service user making a complaint may need practical and emotional support through the process. And a dissatisfied complainant can take up a lot of trustees' time in Board meetings.

Our experience shows that some charities dealing with vulnerable people, such as children or people with disabilities, find an advocate helpful at all stages of the procedure. Our research found that over half of charities with a complaints procedure are willing to accept complaints through an advocate, as are many statutory organisations. One advocate is

the Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS), a statutory nationwide service delivered by charities to support patients and their carers who wish to pursue a complaint about the treatment or care they have received from the National Health Service.

Our research has found that, in the voluntary sector, some people dislike complaining. But they may say they have a problem, concern, or worry. They may ask for a quiet word or a quick chat and then express unhappiness or dissatisfaction. There are many ways in which people can complain without wanting to call it a complaint. But their concern or their dissatisfaction may contain vital information for an organisation's development. Charities can serve their users most effectively by being open to this possibility and identifying complaints however they are made.

*“We don't actually call it a complaints procedure; we call it if anything a contact procedure. It covers complaints and also suggestions, ideas, question marks about things, a whole range of different systems.”*

Representative of a small charity

Charities have told us that it has sometimes helped them – and their service users – to call a complaints procedure by another name because the title can come across as unnecessarily restrictive or negative. We have heard several alternative names, including:

- contact procedure;
- support procedure;
- feedback procedure;
- comments, complaints and compliments.

People making complaints may need support even if they are not evidently vulnerable, because making a complaint can be embarrassing, stressful and exhausting. If the complaint is about an individual within the charity, that person will also need support, because being the focus of a complaint can be

upsetting and worrying. Staff and volunteers who may receive and deal with complaints need support in various forms: induction to help them understand the benefits of complaints to the organisation; guidance or training<sup>26</sup> in how to manage complaints; and support if the task becomes onerous. Stating the likely extent of responsibility for complaints management in the job descriptions of all staff and volunteers, including trustees, can increase their effectiveness.

Support for organisations is also needed. The Charity Complaints Forum provides support and information for anyone managing complaints in the voluntary sector and promotes the use of complaints handling and information to improve service delivery. Some voluntary sector organisations also get support from their umbrella body, parent organisation, partner agency or local CVS.

### Case study

*This case study shows how a charity uses different methods of communication in making its complaints procedure accessible to its users' needs.*

Delphside Ltd is a large<sup>27</sup> charity that runs a residential home for people with mental illness in the North West of England.

The charity recognises that it can sometimes be difficult for users to express their concerns formally. So, as well as ensuring that all residents get details of the complaints procedure when they first arrive at the home, the charity has also set up a residents' forum. This is a way for users to raise in a more relaxed environment a complaint, voice a concern or simply discuss an issue that relates to the service the charity provides.

The residents' forum meets monthly and residents can raise any issues of concern or make suggestions. It has helped to empower residents: they discuss, plan and review home activities. A resident has been chosen as the residents' spokesperson who will speak on behalf of other residents who find it difficult to communicate. The forum has helped build trust between residents and staff and brought transparency to the organisation's work. The trustees are routinely briefed on issues raised in the forum.

This is an example of a charity looking beyond a traditional, formal written complaints procedure and introducing other ways of raising concerns appropriate to users' needs.



Delphside Ltd

<sup>26</sup> Training in complaints management may be available through your local CVS.

<sup>27</sup> We have described charities as "small", "medium", "large" or "very large" according to their income band (see the table in *Annex B* for more information). This is purely for our research purposes and in no way reflects the standing of the charity concerned or makes a judgement on its impact in its own community.



### c. Importance of good communication

A recurring theme in our research is that good communication is the key to integrated complaints management. It plays a role in preventing, managing, resolving and learning from complaints.

*“They (the users) are made aware of the constraints we’re under, like we’ve got no money for transport at the moment, so we make them aware of why there’s no transport – we don’t keep them in the dark. We tell them once we’ve got the money we’ll put it back on again – we’ll write to them and let them know. So I think it’s just keeping people informed, really.”*

Co-ordinator of a medium-sized mental health charity

Participants in our research said keeping everyone informed and involved was a key method of preventing complaints. For example, a medium-sized mental health service with a complaints procedure has had no complaints. Its co-ordinator thinks this is because they keep users informed about what is happening, in contrast to a local, statutorily provided service which does not.

*“They’ve just closed a ward at the local hospital, we realise the reasons but the service users don’t, and they won’t go to the Trust because they think the NHS will chuck them out if they make a stink, so we make a stink on their behalf, and tell the Trust they’ve got to get their message across to the people...”*

Co-ordinator of a medium-sized mental health charity

Information and involvement were also seen as key factors in good management of complaints. Making and keeping to realistic timescales, and communicating well if delays do occur, help to manage people's expectations.

Internal communication appears to be more challenging for large and very large charities than for small- and medium-sized ones. A complaints manager for a very large charity told us it could be difficult to communicate with everyone at the right level and thus make a universal process meaningful. A complaints officer in another very large charity pointed out that this variation may give complainants an advantage because if they talk to two different people they could get different messages from each.

*“It’s about being seen to be showing that we’re taking things seriously and listening and making things right.”*

Manager in a large charity

One focus-group participant stressed that for organisations working in partnership, communication is important not only with complainants and other relevant people in the organisation, but with partner agencies.

Communication is also the key to resolving complaints successfully. People who have taken the trouble to make a complaint will appreciate the charity taking the trouble to let them know it has made a difference. It is good for public relations to go beyond an apology wherever appropriate. We would encourage charities to tell successful complainants about the positive effect of their complaint and what has changed as a result. This is a very useful way to build relationships with users and to protect a charity's reputation.

Finally, communication is necessary in helping staff to learn from complaints. Once a complaint is resolved or stopped, there is an opportunity to reflect on the process and the issues raised. Merely filing the paperwork may mean losing a unique opportunity for organisational learning and improvement.

In summary, communication underpins all other elements of complaints management. Even with excellent complaints management, things can go wrong. But on the whole, people are tolerant of problems if they know and understand what those problems are. On the basis of our research and experience, we know that best practice is to make sure that everyone who is, or could be, involved with a complaints procedure knows exactly what to expect at all times.

#### d. Integrated complaints management

However, trustees and charity employees told us quite clearly that simply adopting another organisation's procedure will not yield the benefits mentioned above. The benefits come from having a complaints procedure that is fully integrated with the charity's work.

Larger charities told us that they faced an additional challenge in complaints management: there can be inconsistencies between the way complaints were managed in different departments of the same charity and in different regions and nations of a UK-wide charity. Even in small and medium-sized charities, we found an increased likelihood that personalities may influence events and inconsistency can result.

We encourage consistency of approach towards people who make complaints. Our research shows that consistency can be improved by using good practice in setting up and implementing a robust complaints procedure.

Larger charities will find it helpful to link their complaints procedure with other cross-cutting procedures such as quality assurance and staff training. For smaller charities, the procedure can be linked with other matters such as the annual report and Annual General Meeting.

Linking the procedure with the job descriptions of trustees, other volunteers and staff helps to create a sense of ownership of complaints management throughout the charity. It also ensures everyone is clear about their part in managing complaints. Linking the procedure with induction and other training for trustees, other volunteers and staff also helps strengthen these aspects of their roles.

In a successful complaints management system:

- everyone who works for or with a charity will know how complaints can be made and managed;
- everyone who uses a charity's services will know how they can make a complaint; and
- everyone who has made a complaint, or is involved in its management, will know what to expect and when.

## Case study

*This case study shows how one charity took the general principles of a complaints procedure and adapted them in a format that was more appropriate for its own users. It illustrates how innovative charities can be in seeking to make their policies accessible and beneficial to users.*



The Advocacy Project

### Camden and Westminster Citizen

Advocacy (known as The Advocacy Project) is a medium-sized<sup>28</sup> charity based in London that helps people with learning disabilities. The charity offers advocacy support to enable people with learning disabilities to speak up and say what they want, to make choices, to obtain services they need, and to gain and assert their rights. It has paid and volunteer advocates who help people with problems and enquiries such as housing and employment.

The charity's website [www.advocacyproject.org.uk](http://www.advocacyproject.org.uk) has been especially designed to accommodate the needs of its users and makes full use of pictures, colours and bold text to explain and promote its aims and activities.

The charity, working with a group of users called The Better Information Group (BIG) has recently reviewed its complaints policy, which is available online. Each section is broken down and clearly signposted to the next stage. It includes the names and photographs of the people assigned to that particular stage of the procedure and sets down the expected timescale for each. The charity has also made a complaints policy video which will also soon be available on-line.

The complaints video has been developed to accompany the policy and the charity hopes this will further benefit users by making the policy more user friendly.

<sup>28</sup> We have described charities as "small", "medium", "large" or "very large" according to their income band (see the table in *Annex B* for more information). This is purely for our research purposes and in no way reflects the standing of the charity concerned or makes a judgement on its impact in its own community.

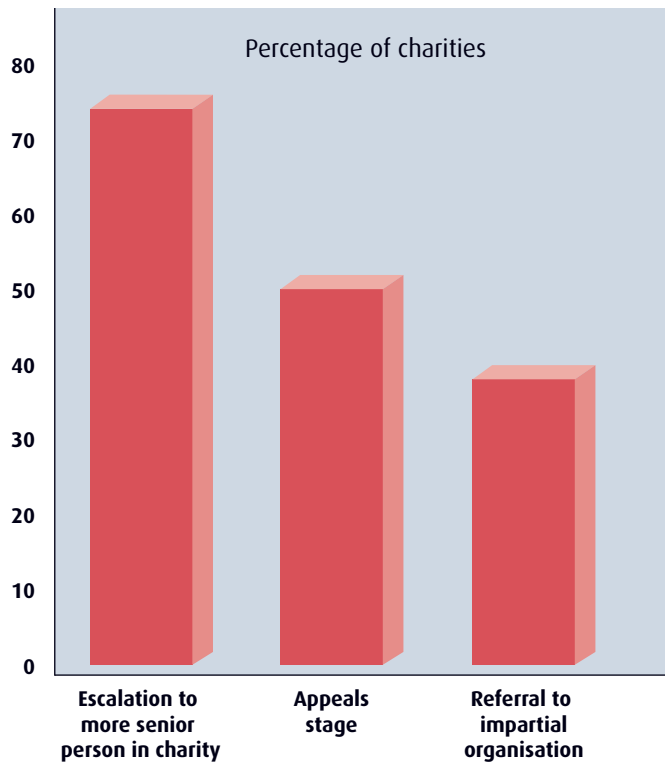
### e. Multiple stages and an impartial person or organisation

Our research found that, when feelings run high, it can be very helpful to involve a person or organisation who has not previously dealt with the complaint and so can be impartial. We were pleased to find that the majority of procedures had at least two stages, the second often including an impartial person or body.

7% had other features including:

- referral to the board of trustees;
- referral to statutory-sector partner agency;
- referral to a regulatory body such as the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) or the Healthcare Commission; and
- a panel stage including impartial people.

### Features of complaints procedures



## Case study

*This case study is an example of a charity whose complaints procedure has multiple stages.*

The Blue Cross is a very large<sup>29</sup> national charity which aims to encourage and promote the protection of animals.



The Blue Cross

The charity knows that complaint-handling is inevitable, given the scale of its contact with people. Therefore, it does not view complaints in a negative light but more as a means of monitoring and improving performance and gauging public perception. It sees its complaints procedure as an essential part of its focus on customers.

The charity regards as a complaint any clear expression of dissatisfaction with its service, whether it comes in person or by telephone, letter, fax or e-mail.

The charity tries to resolve any complaint at the point of contact - ideally by the member of staff receiving the complaint. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, then a report is passed to a manager to investigate further. The second stage of the procedure is dealt with by the Head of Department. If the matter goes unresolved at that stage, it is referred to the Chief Executive.

All significant complaints are then reviewed at monthly senior management meetings to ensure they have been satisfactorily handled, and any training needs or operational or procedural changes identified and acted upon. Quarterly reports are made at Board level.

*“Used properly, complaints can be a fruitful source of learning and continuous improvement.”*

<sup>29</sup> We have described charities as “small”, “medium”, “large” or “very large” according to their income band (see the table in *Annex B* for more information). This is purely for our research purposes and in no way reflects the standing of the charity concerned or makes a judgement on its impact in its own community.

The stages of a complaints procedure need to be appropriate to the charity's size and structure. In a very small charity there may be just two stages, involving, for example, the trustees and then an impartial organisation such as the local CVS. In a very large charity there may be as many as five stages involving, for example the local manager, a central manager, the chief executive, a review panel chaired by the chair of the trustees and an impartial organisation such as a regulator.

Charities told us that access to an impartial person or organisation was beneficial for people making complaints and for organisations managing those complaints. Some charities have access to impartial partner agencies, usually once the charity's own procedures are exhausted, such as statutory-sector organisations, or regulators, for example:

- complaints about health services may be referred to the Healthcare Commission;
- complaints about social care services may be referred to the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI);
- complaints about services for children and learners may be referred to Ofsted; and
- complaints about the Charity Commission itself may be referred to the Charity Commission's Independent Complaints Reviewer.

Around 40% of medium-sized, large and very large charities with a complaints procedure responding to our survey referred complaints to an impartial source as part of their procedure. For charities with an income of less than £10,000 (what we class as small charities), this dropped to 28% of respondents.

For some charities, there is often no obvious impartial person or organisation that can advise or help. Most small and medium-sized charities without a complaints procedure said they did not have a specific person or organisation they would go to for impartial advice and help if a complaint arose. However, some of them suggested people or organisations they could use, or had used, in such circumstances: for example, a small animal welfare charity had turned to a local vet, a small carers' charity would look to their CVS for help, and a small disability charity would contact their local social services department for impartial input if necessary.

However, one interviewee said that referring a complaint to an impartial person or organisation could be counter-productive if the person or organisation departed from the role laid down in the charity's complaints procedure and insisted on re-opening the investigation from scratch. Clearly, for a charity and its users to benefit from an independent external element to its procedure, unambiguous definitions of the roles of each are essential.

## Case study

*This case study demonstrates benefit to individuals and an organisation from having an impartial person in complaints management. In this example, the involvement of someone impartial helped clarify a situation that had become intractable, allowed each party to consider the other's point of view and provided a positive basis for working together in the future.*

NCH is a very large<sup>30</sup> children's charity, which works to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children, young people and families.



NCH

Paul Cordwell – Some NCH photographs are posed by models.

The parents of a young disabled person living in an NCH residential unit were concerned about how the home was addressing aspects of his behaviour and felt that he was being asked to attempt tasks beyond his capabilities. They raised their concerns with the home on several occasions and challenged staff when they felt his needs were not being met.

The unit management team responded to the parents' concerns both verbally and in writing and tried to reassure them that improvements in their child's behaviour had resulted from the behaviour-management strategies that staff were using with him. However, the parents remained dissatisfied. The management team felt that the local stage of the charity's complaint system had been exhausted and there was nothing else they could do.

NCH moved on to the second stage of the complaints procedure and appointed an impartial, independent investigator. The investigator reviewed the files and met the parents, staff and the management team. The investigator decided that the unit had acted appropriately in the steps it had taken in its assessment of the young person's needs and there was evidence that under this regime he had started to show improvements. However, the investigator concluded that the unit should have taken more time to fully explain to the parents the reasons behind some of the decisions.

The management team acted on the investigator's recommendations and drew up an action plan to fully involve the parents in decisions about the management of the young person's behaviour. This included an agreed contract about staff and parents' expectations of each other. However, the process of having someone impartial listen to both sides and help them understand each other's point of view was so useful that the contract has not been needed.

<sup>30</sup> We have described charities as "small", "medium", "large" or "very large" according to their income band (see the table in *Annex B* for more information). This is purely for our research purposes and in no way reflects the standing of the charity concerned or makes a judgement on its impact in its own community.

## f. Working in partnership

Our research found a lot of scope for working in partnership with other charities or organisations in managing complaints and we saw evidence of this. For example, we found instances where charities with complaints procedures were willing to manage a complaint about a charity without one. We were also told that charities are often asked to support users in making complaints about other organisations. We were very pleased to find such firm evidence that charities are working together to share experience and good practice in managing complaints.

Some charities that lack complaints procedures themselves may be able to help their users to access the procedures of others. For example, a charity may have a parent organisation, umbrella body or funder that is willing to receive and manage complaints on the charity's behalf. However, our interviews show that awareness of this among charity trustees and staff is low. Most charities that had a parent organisation either did not know whether it had a complaints procedure or, if they definitely knew that it had, then they did not know how their users could access it. Only one interviewee was able to state categorically that her charity's parent organisation had a complaints procedure and to give a clear explanation of how users could access it.

*“If there’s a continuum of care, I think it’s incumbent on those organisations to have one response which allows people to access complaints processes. And they ought to be helped through them.”*

The Charity Commission’s Independent Complaints Reviewer

The complaints manager of a very large children’s charity told us that all their services are provided on a partnership basis with local authorities or health trusts. This makes it difficult to know which complaints procedure to use.

If a charity is entering into partnership with another organisation of any kind to provide a service on its

Some charities also told us there may be other bodies to which people could complain if they wished, such as the local CVS, one of the charity's funders, or the parish council.

One fact that emerged strongly from our focus groups and telephone interviews was that many charities were delivering public services. The Charity Commission’s Independent Complaints Reviewer also mentioned this as an area of concern during our interview with her.

As the landscape of the sector changes and an increasing number of charities are becoming involved in public service delivery, a number of new issues for charities to consider have emerged.

For example, a focus-group participant said that now it is increasingly common for services to be provided by charities on behalf of the statutory sector, this can make it hard for people using those services to see where the boundaries between organisations lie. This in turn makes it difficult for them to know who to complain to.

behalf, they need to be very clear about how complaints will be managed. This would ideally be spelt out in any overarching document such as a contract, partnership agreement or service-level agreement. Otherwise it is not only the users but also the organisations that can experience problems.

*“The local authority sometimes has the view that it has to be their [complaints procedure] because they have statutory responsibility, but we’ve put a lot of energy into ours and we tend to think it’s better.”*

Complaints manager of a very large charity



## Case study

*This is an example of a clear, accessible complaints system which is widely communicated, supports users and has two stages.*

Sangam is a small<sup>31</sup> charity based in London which offers support to elderly or infirm Asian men and women and their carers.



Sangam

The trustees have recognised that it is important to have a system in place so that the charity's users have a route to take if they are unhappy with its service. The charity openly lets its users know that if they do have any concerns, they should approach staff as soon as possible who will try and resolve matters.

As any concerns are usually resolved informally, the charity has not received a formal complaint since it was established. The charity is also closely affiliated with the local Council for Voluntary Service and users are always told that, if they do have a problem and do not want to speak to the charity directly, they can contact the local small groups worker there who will deal with complaints directly without them being routed through the charity's internal system.

A number of charities of various sizes, including a small mental health charity and a large children's charity, reported that they played a role in helping their users make complaints about other statutory and voluntary organisations. Some charities reported that they had been asked for help by other charities to set up or manage a complaints procedure. We found that charities were very willing to help each

other, sometimes even answering queries from organisations in other countries.

The examples of partnership working we saw as part of our research show excellent practice. We strongly encourage charities to work together and to share good practice and resources in managing complaints.

<sup>31</sup> We have described charities as "small", "medium", "large" or "very large" according to their income band (see the table in *Annex B* for more information). This is purely for our research purposes and in no way reflects the standing of the charity concerned or makes a judgement on its impact in its own community.

### g. Redress

When a complaint is successful, the complainant has a right to expect some form of redress. Redress for a successful complainant works best if it is in proportion to their complaint. In many cases, a sincere apology is enough. But sometimes more action is needed.

Our research found that the types of redress offered to successful complainants seem to be appropriate to the sector. Redress appears to be in keeping with the seriousness of the complaint and the nature of the charity offering it. It usually takes the form of an apology, or a promise to make sure the problem is not repeated, or both. Financial compensation had

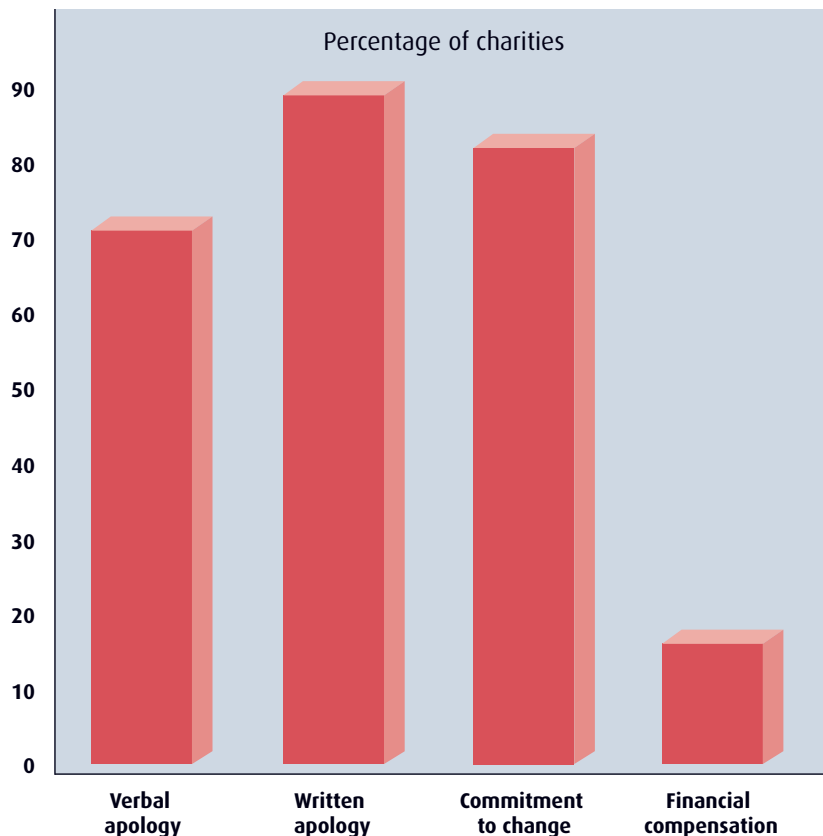
only been given by 16% of charities surveyed. Where compensation was paid, it was usually to redress a genuine financial loss, or another loss that could only be compensated financially.

Charities told us that it helps to ask the person making the complaint, at the earliest possible stage, what they want as an outcome. Then, if their complaint succeeds, the charity may be able to provide this. If it is not possible or appropriate to provide their desired outcome, then an outcome that seems proportionate could be offered.

*“If the complainant is sincere, the best redress they can possibly have is a letter saying we’ve listened, we’ve done something about it.”*

A focus-group participant

Types of redress<sup>32</sup>



<sup>32</sup> Charities could choose more than one option and so the percentages do not add up to 100%.

Most participants in our interviews and focus groups thought it would be inappropriate to divert publicly donated money from the good causes for which it was intended into the pockets of aggrieved individuals. However, our view is that if, as a result of a charity's action, a complainant has suffered a genuine financial loss or another loss that could only be compensated financially, then payment may be appropriate. It may also be money well spent if the charity gains knowledge or enhances its reputation from the experience. The final decision would, of course, rest with the trustees.

There are various options of redress that a charity can offer. Common ones we found include:

- making a commitment to ensure that whatever went wrong does not recur;
- providing tangible evidence of work done to achieve this, such as copies of meeting minutes or an invitation to a key event;
- sending a letter of apology and appreciation from a senior person in the charity;
- rectifying the problem where possible; or
- waiving part or all of any charge made to the complainant.

We even saw examples where people who have complained that the charity's services or funds were inadequate or insufficient were, as a direct result, invited to volunteer their efforts to improve the situation.

### Examples of redress

Most charities adopt a sensible and proportionate attitude to redress, and put time and effort into considering the appropriate response to complainants' legitimate grievances. We found the following examples of redress:

- A church representative told us that one parishioner was very upset about family ashes being in part of the churchyard that was often flooded. The church arranged for the ashes to be moved to another churchyard and the parishioner was very satisfied.
- A national charity disclosed a woman's address by accident to her ex-partner. As a result they helped her to move house.
- A focus-group participant representing a national organisation with a chain of charity shops told us that they sometimes resolve complaints from customers by giving a £5 token to spend in the shop. They find that this resolves issues quickly and helps them keep their customers.
- The complaints officer of a national charity told us that a child who complained because workmen had squashed one of his toys was given £5 to spend on a new toy. This satisfied him because he'd been listened to and compensated.

## h. Vexatious complaints

Despite the best efforts of charities, some complaints cannot be resolved to everyone's satisfaction. It is important to recognise when a complaint has become unhelpful to the complainant and the organisation. This can be difficult because, as a focus group participant pointed out, '*a resolution of a complaint is not always giving them what they want*'.

A small number of people do find it difficult to stop complaining. This may be because involvement in

charities is often accompanied by strong feelings about social justice. The complaints co-ordinator for a large national charity told us that in a few cases people just kept on complaining no matter what the response. When they had exhausted the procedure and the complainant was still dissatisfied, the last resort was a letter from the chief executive putting a stop to the complaint.

### Case study

*This case study looks at persistent complainants and is an example of how it is not always possible to resolve complaints to the satisfaction of those involved.*

A medium-sized<sup>33</sup> charity set up to assist people in times of distress was the subject of complaints from a former employee. The complainant contacted the Commission over concerns that the charity was not being administered properly.

The Commission sought clarification from the charity, which confirmed that it was aware of the complaints and had suggested a face-to-face meeting to try and resolve matters informally but the offer had never been taken up. The complainant had exhausted the charity's own complaints procedure and looked to the Commission to act on his behalf. After assessing information from both the charity and the complainant, the Commission concluded that there was no cause for concern and it would not be taking matters further.

Dissatisfied with the Commission's decision the complainant moved to have the matter reviewed through the Commission's complaints procedure. The review did not re-open the case but assessed the Commission's handling of it, particularly the areas which had been highlighted by the complainant. It found that the Commission had acted properly and the complaints were not upheld

<sup>33</sup> We have described charities as "small", "medium", "large" or "very large" according to their income band (see the table in *Annex B* for more information). This is purely for our research purposes and in no way reflects the standing of the charity concerned or makes a judgement on its impact in its own community.

Managing this kind of complaint is much easier if a charity has an adequate complaints procedure in place and can demonstrate that the procedure has been followed properly. Otherwise it can be extremely time-consuming.

A dissatisfied complainant may be able to use alternative forms of dispute resolution such as mediation and arbitration and recourse to regulatory bodies and ombudsmen, tribunals and legal

proceedings. However, these are not always available to people complaining about charities. They may not be available in the local area, may be prohibitively expensive, or may not be appropriate for the complaint in question.

Please see the section on *Possible role of an ombudsman* for details of future possible recourse for complainants.

## Resources

The **Institute of Fundraising** is the professional body for UK fundraisers, working to promote the highest standards in fundraising practice and management. Its website is at [www.institute-of-fundraising.org.uk](http://www.institute-of-fundraising.org.uk)

The **Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS)** supports patients and their carers wishing to pursue a complaint about their NHS treatment or care. There are no central contact details or website for ICAS but local branches are listed on the Department of Health website at [www.doh.gov.uk](http://www.doh.gov.uk)

Contact details for local **Councils of Voluntary Service** can be found through the NACVS website at [www.nacvs.org.uk](http://www.nacvs.org.uk)<sup>34</sup>

The **Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR)** is widely regarded as a leading provider of alternative dispute resolution services. Its website is at [www.cedr.co.uk](http://www.cedr.co.uk)

**Mediation UK** is a national voluntary umbrella organisation dedicated to developing constructive means of resolving conflicts in communities. Its website is at [www.mediationuk.org.uk](http://www.mediationuk.org.uk)

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<sup>34</sup> The National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service (NACVS) is changing its name to the National Association of Voluntary and Community Associations (NAVCA) in June 2006.

## 6. Analysing and learning from complaints

### Key findings

- 46% of charities analyse the complaints they have dealt with.

Of these:

- 28% have used the outcome of a complaint to change for the better the standards of service the charity provides;
- 19% have used the outcome of a complaint to change the way the charity operates;
- 11% have used the outcome of a complaint to amend the charity's complaints procedure.

Dealing with complaints need not be a negative experience for charities. A charity that recognises when things have gone wrong and can learn from it is more likely to improve its understanding of, and support from, its users and wider stakeholders.

We were therefore pleased to find that 46% of charities with complaints procedures analyse their complaints. We found that even a single complaint can be analysed to extract the issues for discussion and publication without disclosing confidential details. These charities have used the outcome of complaints to change the way they operate for the better.

However, we were disappointed that only 17% of those who analyse their complaints also publish their findings. Of course, identifiable details of complaints

or complainants must not be published. But other charities' experience shows that publishing the results of analysis, perhaps in an annual report, increases transparency and public confidence.

It is helpful to have a clear system for recording the number of complaints received, what they are about, what action was taken and the outcome. This can be done very simply, eg through the minutes of trustees' meetings, or a computer database can be used.

## Case study

*This case study looks at how a charity uses complaints as a tool for development and self-assessment.*

Crossroads Caring for Carers – Staffordshire is a regional branch of the national organisation. It is a large<sup>35</sup> charity whose purpose is to help carers cope with everyday demands and stresses by providing a home-based respite service. Trainer Carer Support Workers deputise for the Carer for periods of time, enabling the carer to take a well-earned rest, safe in the knowledge that the person they care for is being looked after.

The charity is affiliated to Crossroads Association and has to achieve the standards laid down in 'Croquet' – Crossroads Association Quality Evaluation Tool. This helps the charity to maintain high standards of service, while developing services to meet carers' changing needs. Croquet ensures a consistent approach to complaint management throughout the Association and its member schemes.

The charity conducts an annual client satisfaction survey as part of this process. Its results are collated and presented to the Board of Trustees alongside an implementation plan which, once accepted, is disseminated throughout the organisation. This process helps the organisation to deliver and maintain high-quality services.

Organisations may also wish to seek feedback from complainants about their experience of the complaints procedure and use this to improve their complaints management.

Our research showed that over 40% of charities with complaints procedures do not analyse their

complaints. These charities are missing a vital learning opportunity. Of course not all complaints will enable an organisation to learn something new or to make useful changes to its service. However, we know from our research that many do.

*"I'm still not sure – speaking for my own organisation – that people see the value of complaints, using complaints in a proactive way and because of that I don't think resources are allocated properly."*

Focus-group participant

<sup>35</sup> We have described charities as "small", "medium", "large" or "very large" according to their income band (see the table in *Annex B* for more information). This is purely for our research purposes and in no way reflects the standing of the charity concerned or makes a judgement on its impact in its own community.

Many charities that analysed their complaints had used the findings to make changes to their internal and operational procedures. Around 40% of charities with a complaints procedure had used the outcome of a complaint to make one or more changes to their organisation.

7% of charities involved in the research had made other changes including:

- changes to other written procedures and policies;
- a review of operational procedures;
- a reduction in waiting times;
- changes to publicity material;
- an increase in supervision of charity staff/volunteers;
- a commitment to provide more training;

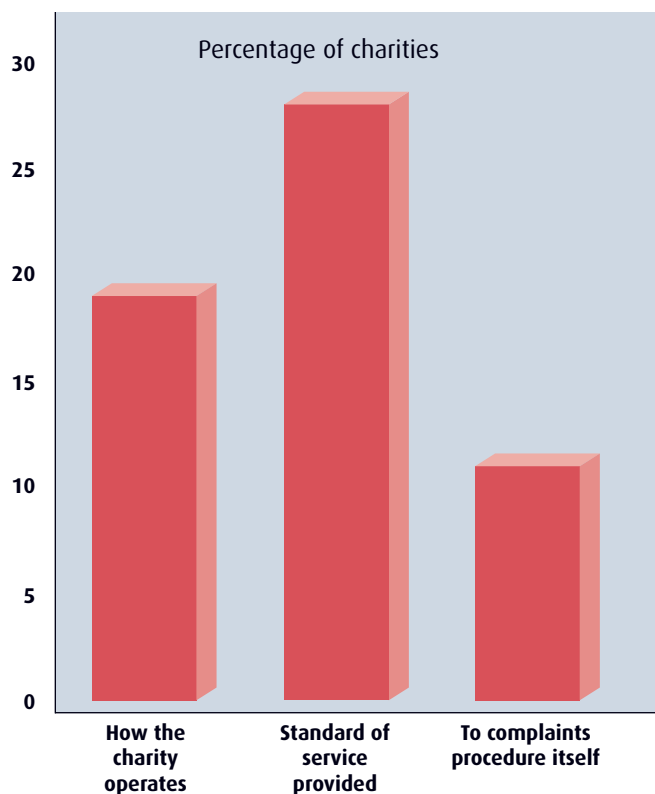
- changes to internal systems, eg quality assurance systems.

Charities also told us that a complaints procedure itself will benefit from regular reviews. This applies:

- whether it is a formal written procedure or not;
- whether complaints have been received since the last review;
- whether feedback from complainants is sought or not.

If complaints have been received, a procedure can be reviewed in the light of issues arising from how it worked. In any case, changes to best practice in complaints management may dictate that a procedure be reviewed. And keeping a procedure up to date is one way of providing a good service to users – even if they do not want or need to use it.

### How outcomes of complaints are used to make changes to charities



### Resources

There is a checklist for complaints management in *Annex A* of this report.

Other charities' websites may have helpful information about complaints procedures and complaints management. Using those or similar phrases as search terms in an internet search engine will yield various web pages on the subject.



## 7. Looking to the future

### Key findings

- Over two-thirds of charities lack a complaints procedure.
- Of charities without a complaints procedure, 80% said they did not need one.

#### a. Charities without a procedure

Our research and casework has uncovered a great deal of good practice in complaints management. However, we are aware there is room for improvement, especially in the many charities that have probably not given the matter serious thought, perhaps because they have not yet had a complaint.

Some charities without complaints procedures held a negative view of complaints. However, our research shows that the majority of charities with complaint procedures have found them beneficial. Our case-working experience has also shown that complaints to charities without complaints procedures can be much more difficult to deal with. So on the basis of our research and case-working experience, we suggest that a negative view of complaints is mistaken.

Of the charities surveyed that lack a complaints procedure 80% said they did not need one. We question the use of the word 'need' in this context. In our interviews, some charities said they did not want a complaints procedure because it would lead to complaints. However, lack of a procedure could prevent charities from receiving valuable feedback.

Also, there is evidence that charities without a complaints procedure lose support as a result. Some small and medium-sized charities see this as a matter of personal choice because involvement in a charity is a voluntary decision. If people dislike a charity's services or activities, they are free to leave. Therefore, these charities say, there is no need for a complaints procedure. We believe this is a false assumption.

Certainly, the trustees are ultimately responsible for deciding what activities to pursue to fulfil the charity's objects. And they need not change those activities just because somebody dislikes them. But a casual approach to complaints may result in missed opportunities to learn and grow. The key to grasping these opportunities is to maintain an open dialogue with users, including recognising and valuing complaints. After all, complaints are communication too.

Since our research has produced such a wealth of evidence about the benefits of complaints management procedures, we urge all trustees to look afresh at whether their charity needs one, or, if they already have one, whether it still meets their needs. *Annex A* brings together in the form of a list of questions most of the relevant issues from this report and *Annex D* lists other useful resources.

Of course, not all the questions will apply to all charities; we expect trustees to approach them with discretion and common sense. For example, a large charity may have very different requirements from a small charity. Also we do not recommend that any charity adopt another organisation's procedure without carefully thinking it through in their own terms. Even charities with similar objects may discharge their responsibilities very differently. There is no 'one size fits all' procedure and it is important to get the right procedure for each charity and its users. We hope to see a real and sustained improvement in complaints management throughout the sector in the coming years.

## b. Possible role of an ombudsman

Some charities and some users have recourse to regulatory bodies, but others have no realistic option for a dissatisfied user beyond the charity's own complaints procedure. In her 2005 Annual Report<sup>36</sup>, the Charity Commission's Independent Complaints Reviewer said this was a clear gap in the sector's overall approach to complaints management. She said that 'they [the charities' users] look to the Charity Commission because they have nowhere else to turn'. Of course, anyone who is dissatisfied with a charity can use the legal system but, as she also says, this is prohibitively expensive. She has proposed that the sector needs a Charity Ombudsman.

Opinions on the issue among the charities we spoke to were almost equally divided between those who said 'yes', those who said 'no' and those who said 'maybe'.

The Charity Commission's Independent Complaints Reviewer said that an 'ombudsman might cost organisations a small premium, but would save them time and money and reduce the human cost of making complaints'. However, concern was expressed about how an ombudsman would be funded. Small charities with an annual budget of less than £10,000, which make up the majority of those on the Register, said they would struggle to find money to support an ombudsman. Some interviewees said that money used to fund an ombudsman should more properly be used directly for charitable purposes. However, if an ombudsman increased the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the sector, then some charities thought it would be money well spent.

There were several suggestions about the role and attributes that might be needed for a Charity Ombudsman, if such a person were appointed. These covered various areas.

For example, there was some debate about which charities an ombudsman should work with. While some respondents felt that the ombudsman's remit should cover only the larger charities, others thought the focus should be on charities providing services to individuals; or trusts and grant-makers; or charities that already have a complaints procedure.

Charities were also concerned with the approach an ombudsman should take to complaints. It was felt that an ombudsman should check that a charity has followed its own procedure correctly before re-investigating any complaint. It should also check that a charity has taken all possible routes of investigation before assuming responsibility for managing a complaint. Some felt that the ombudsman's role should include acting as a resource for complainants, to support them in resolving their complaint.

An ombudsman's wider role was also discussed. Some charities felt it would be beneficial if he or she could champion complaints management in the voluntary sector. Charities also thought the ombudsman could play a role in:

- persuading organisations to allocate appropriate resources to complaints handling;
- acting as a resource for voluntary organisations to support best practice; and
- making recommendations to the sector about issues such as redress.

Charities also stressed that an ombudsman would only help the sector if he or she had the right mix of knowledge and abilities that would provide a proper understanding of the full range and diversity of the voluntary sector and an ability to see both – or all – sides of a complaint. Clearly, an ombudsman must also act impartially.

Finally, there was a clear feeling that an ombudsman must have autonomy and authority. He or she should be independent of the sector and the Charity Commission, and have the authority to make enquiries and resolve complaints, which would include:

- deciding whether a complaint was justified; and
- making authoritative recommendations about appropriate redress.

The Charity Commission's findings in this area will be taken into account in any future considerations over an ombudsman for the sector and his/her possible role.

<sup>36</sup> The Charity Commission's Independent Complaints Reviewer produces annual reports called *Seeking a Fair Resolution*. These are available on her website at [www.icrev.demon.co.uk](http://www.icrev.demon.co.uk)

## Resources

There is a checklist for complaints management in *Annex A* of this report.

The Charity Commission's **Independent Complaints Reviewer** produces annual reports, *Seeking a Fair Resolution*, which are available on her website at [www.icrev.demon.co.uk](http://www.icrev.demon.co.uk)

The **British and Irish Ombudsmen Association** aims to encourage, develop and safeguard the role and title of ombudsmen, formulate and promote standards of best practice, improve public awareness of recognised ombudsman schemes and encourage their efficiency and effectiveness. The Association's website is at [www.bioa.org.uk](http://www.bioa.org.uk)

## Trustee checklist for complaints management

This checklist offers questions for charities to consider in managing complaints about the services they offer. These questions have been drawn from our casework experience and our research for this report.

Not all questions will apply to all types or sizes of charity. For example, large charities may have different requirements from small charities; or a charity that simply provides grants may need a less stringent procedure than one that provides direct services to vulnerable users. It may be helpful to use some or all of the questions that apply to your charity, and any which are not ticked, as starting points for discussions.

### Getting started



Does your charity have a clear definition of a complaint?

Do you have a clearly defined procedure for managing complaints? (Note: this doesn't only refer to a formal written procedure, but could also include, for example, a process for dealing with complaints agreed and minuted at a trustee meeting).

Are all potential complainants, for example, service users, carers or other representatives of service users fully aware of your procedure?

Have you considered the needs of your potential complainants/users, carers and representatives of service users to make sure your complaints procedure is fully accessible to them?

Does your procedure involve at least two stages?

Does it include input from an independent person or organisation in at least one stage?

### Recognising and managing complaints



Does your procedure make clear who is ultimately accountable for managing complaints?

Is everyone who may be involved in managing a complaint, at any stage, fully aware of their role in the process?

Is your complaints procedure explained as part of the induction process for volunteers, including trustees, and staff?

Does everyone who may be involved in managing a complaint have access to training in complaints management?

Does your charity recognise and acknowledge any expression of dissatisfaction as a potential complaint?

Does your procedure have set timescales?

Do you deal with complaints quickly?<sup>37</sup>

Do you deal with complaints locally, i.e. where and when they are first received?

## Managing expectations



Do you ask the complainant, at the earliest possible stage, what they want as an outcome of their complaint?

Are you confident that your complaints management system will operate consistently at different times and/or in different locations?

Does your procedure include information about how to stop a complaint if it has become unhelpful to the complainant and the organisation?

Do you offer practical or emotional support to complainants?

Do you offer support to people who are complained about?

Do you seek support at an organisational level in managing complaints from another organisation or group, such as your parent organisation, an umbrella organisation such as the CVS, a statutory partner or the Charity Complaints Forum?

## Managing and reviewing outcomes



Do you have a system for recording the number of complaints you receive and what they are about?

Do you analyse and publish information about the number, nature and outcome of the complaints you have received?

Do you use this information to review and improve the services you offer?

Are any learning points from complaints communicated throughout your organisation?

Do successful complainants receive suitable and proportionate redress?

Do you seek feedback from complainants about their experience of your complaints procedure and use this to improve the way you manage complaints?

Is your complaints management system integrated with other systems within the organisation, such as your annual report, annual general meeting, staff training, quality assurance, or duty of care?

Do you review your procedure regularly, taking into account any issues that have arisen since the last review as well as any changes to best practice in complaints management?

Would you be able to offer any support or advice to another charity in setting up a complaints management system and/or managing complaints?

37 Because of the diversity of the sector, 'quickly' means different things to different people: 48 hours would be very quick even for a large charity with a complaints department. For a small charity that only meets quarterly, 'quickly' might mean 'within a month'. Our feeling, therefore, is that we leave the definition of 'quickly' to the charity concerned.

## Annex B

### Research techniques and survey findings

We commissioned a postal survey of a random sample of 3,000 registered charities, weighted across four income bands. We have also commissioned the collection and analysis of qualitative data from documents, interviews, focus groups and Commission staff seminars. We worked with the qualitative researcher to collect case studies from our casework, the interviews and the focus groups.

#### Quantitative data collection

The postal survey achieved a 38% response rate, which is high for surveys of this nature. In total, 1,129 completed forms were returned for analysis. This allows a confidence interval<sup>38</sup> exceeding +/- 3%, which is industry standard.

The survey sample was stratified into the following income bands:

Size of charity	Income band	% of total register	Numbers selected for mailing	Numbers returned
Very large	£1 million or more	3	300	105
Large	£250,001 to £999,999	5	300	131
Medium	£10,001 to £250,000	34	900	349
Small	£10,000 or less	58	1500	544
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>3000</b>	<b>1129</b>

Quantitative data was analysed using Quantum software.

#### Qualitative data collection

Data for the qualitative analysis was collected from:

- two focus groups with seven members of the Charity Complaints Forum representing five large and very large charities, all of which had complaints procedures, held in July 2005;
- telephone interviews with four members of the Charity Complaints Forum representing four large and very large charities, three of which had complaints procedures, held in August 2005;
- interview with the Charity Commission's Independent Complaints Reviewer Jodi Berg held in July 2005; and
- telephone interviews with 30 individuals representing 42 small and medium-sized charities, five of which had complaints procedures, held in September 2005.

The participating charities covered a wide range of themes and activities. They included:

- urban and rural charities;
- grant-makers to individuals and organisations;
- service providers;
- buildings/grounds providers;
- sport and recreation charities;
- arts charities;
- animal welfare charities;
- environmental and heritage charities;
- Christian faith groups;
- charities serving children and young people, families, elderly people, people with physical and learning disabilities and people from black and minority ethnic communities;

<sup>38</sup> A confidence interval is the expected range of outcomes: a range of statistical values within which a result is expected to fall with a specific probability.

- charities concerned with the relief of poverty;
- charities concerned with physical and mental health and medical issues;
- charities concerned with education, training and employment;
- charities concerned with accommodation and housing; and
- international charities.

Relevant documents within the Commission and externally were analysed for reference to complaints procedures, the voluntary sector and good practice. Case studies were collected from the Commission’s caseworking archives and the Charity Complaints Forum, as well as through the focus groups and telephone interviews. Seminars were held with Charity Commission staff in all four offices to explore their perception of the issues.

Qualitative data was analysed using NVivo software.

### Survey findings

Some of the results refer to open questions or those where a charity could choose more than one option, so the aggregate score may not equal 100%. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding or the question allowing for more than one response.

#### Table 1 covers all charities.

Table 1: Does your organisation have a complaints procedure?

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
Yes	30	12	38	59	62
No	69	86	61	40	38
No answer	1	2	1	1	-
<b>Base</b>	<b>1129</b>	<b>544</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>105</b>

#### Tables 2 to 21 include data from all charities with complaints procedures.

Table 2: How many times has your complaints procedure been used in the last 12 months?

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
None	66	78	78	58	37
1-5	27	16	20	37	40
6-10	2	-	-	3	5
11-14	-	-	-	-	-
15-20	1	-	-	-	6
21-30	1	-	-	1	3
31-40	-	-	-	-	-
41-50	1	-	-	-	2
Over 50	2	-	-	1	5
Don't know	1	3	1	-	2
No answer	2	3	2	-	2
<b>Base</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>65</b>

Table 3: Are your services paid for by users, subsidised or free?

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
Paid	11	5	4	14	28
Part paid/ subsidised	7	2	8	10	9
Free/user does not pay	21	14	13	30	32
Don't know	2	2	2	3	2
No answer	68	81	80	56	45
<b>Base</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>65</b>

Table 4: Number of complaints for paid services

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
One	35	67	80	27	22
Two	22	-	-	27	28
Three	8	-	-	9	11
Four	8	-	20	9	6
Five	5	-	-	9	6
More than 5	11	-	-	-	22
No answer	11	33	-	18	6
<b>Base</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18</b>

Table 5: Number of complaints for subsidised services

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
One	20	100	40	-	-
Two	16	-	20	25	-
Three	4	-	-	-	17
Four	4	-	-	13	-
Five	-	-	-	-	-
More than 5	16	-	-	13	50
No answer	40	-	40	50	33
<b>Base</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>



Table 6: Number of complaints for free services

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
One	38	44	41	44	29
Two	16	33	12	13	14
Three	9	-	12	9	10
Four	1	-	-	-	5
Five	6	-	-	9	10
More than 5	9	-	-	4	24
No answer	21	22	35	22	10
<b>Base</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21</b>

Table 7: Number of complaints for services where payment not known

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
One	17	-	50	-	-
Two	-	-	-	-	-
Three	-	-	-	-	-
Four	-	-	-	-	-
Five	-	-	-	-	-
More than 5	17	-	-	50	-
No answer	67	100	50	50	100
<b>Base</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

Table 8: Number of upheld complaints

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
One	4	-	3	8	3
Two	2	2	2	3	3
Three	1	-	1	1	3
Four	0	-	-	-	2
Five	1	-	-	1	5
More than 5	1	-	-	1	3
No answer	91	98	95	86	82
<b>Base</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>65</b>

Table 9: Number of partially upheld complaints

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
One	6	3	5	8	6
Two	3	2	2	4	8
Three	1	-	-	1	5
Four	0	-	-	-	2
Five	0	-	-	-	2
More than 5	1	-	-	3	-
No answer	89	95	93	85	79
<b>Base</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>65</b>

Table 10: Number of not upheld complaints

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
One	7	2	4	9	17
Two	3	2	1	4	5
Three	2	-	-	1	8
Four	1	-	-	1	1
Five	-	-	-	-	-
More than 5	2	-	-	1	6
No answer	87	97	95	83	63
<b>Base</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>65</b>

Table 11: Number of complaints with unknown outcome

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
One	2	-	4	-	3
Two	1	2	1	1	2
Three	-	-	-	-	-
Four	-	-	-	-	-
Five	-	-	-	-	-
More than 5	-	-	-	-	-
No answer	97	98	96	99	95
<b>Base</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>65</b>

Table 12: How can people initiate a complaint?

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
Verbally	79	81	77	80	79
In writing	89	86	86	92	95
By email	47	41	38	46	75
Through an advocate	57	50	56	67	54
Other	5	6	2	7	5
No answer	8	8	12	5	5
<b>Base</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>65</b>

Table 13: How do you let people know about your complaints procedure?

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
Verbally to service users as a matter of course	41	31	43	47	37
Verbally to service users when a complaint is made	39	44	35	35	48
Verbally to others as a matter of course	15	13	14	17	19
Verbally to others when a complaint is made	19	19	18	15	23
Leaflets	37	30	33	47	40
Posters	17	5	20	24	17
Website	11	11	7	13	17
Other	31	21	36	29	37
No answer	7	8	10	-	8
<b>Base</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>65</b>

Table 14: Do you produce your complaints procedure in...?

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
Other languages	8	9	7	13	3
Other formats	5	5	2	13	5
Neither	83	83	85	77	86
No answer	6	8	8	1	6
<b>Base</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>65</b>

Table 15: Do you formally analyse and/or publish the complaints you have dealt with?

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
Yes, analyse	46	39	32	59	63
Yes, publish	8	8	4	12	11
No, neither	41	48	47	35	26
No answer	12	13	18	4	9
<b>Base</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>65</b>

Table 16: Have you ever used the outcome of a complaint to...?

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
Change the way the charity operates	19	13	13	26	29
Change the standard the service provides	28	27	22	40	28
Amend your complaints procedure	11	8	6	15	17
Make other changes	7	8	5	6	11
None of these	39	36	47	30	40
No answer	19	25	23	12	12
<b>Base</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>65</b>

Table 17: Are any of the following features of your complaints procedure?

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
Escalation to a more senior person within the charity	74	55	75	83	82
Appeals process	50	31	41	67	66
Referral to an impartial person or organisation	38	28	41	41	40
Other	7	14	6	1	6
None of these	10	20	11	8	3
No answer	5	6	5	1	8
<b>Base</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>65</b>

Table 18: What forms of redress might a successful complainant expect from your organisation?

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
Verbal apology	71	72	72	72	66
Written apology	89	88	87	94	92
Commitment to change, to ensure problem won't happen again	82	73	78	91	86
Financial or other form of compensation	16	9	13	19	26
Other	3	-	5	-	6
No answer	4	6	5	1	5
<b>Base</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>65</b>

Table 19: What is the estimated cost to your organisation of dealing with complaints each year?

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
Nothing/no complaints received	64	81	73	58	39
Under £1,000	20	9	14	33	26
£1,001-£5,000	3	-	-	1	12
£5,001-£10,000	1	-	-	-	6
£10,001-£20,000	-	-	-	-	2
Over £20,000	-	-	-	-	-
Don't know	5	3	5	3	8
No answer	7	6	8	5	8
<b>Base</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>65</b>

Table 20: Is there a timescale within which the complaint must be dealt with?

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
Yes, for the whole procedure	51	38	41	63	71
Yes, for part of the procedure	3	2	3	4	1
No	34	48	42	22	19
Other	6	5	5	8	6
No answer	7	8	10	4	3
<b>Base</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>65</b>

Table 21: Overall, how does your complaints procedure affect your organisation?

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
Very beneficial	20	20	20	22	17
Beneficial	43	33	42	51	46
Neither beneficial nor detrimental	32	38	33	24	32
Detrimental	-	-	-	-	-
Very detrimental	-	-	-	-	-
No answer	5	10	5	3	5
<b>Base</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>65</b>

Tables 22 to 24 include data from all charities without complaints procedures.

Table 22: Why don't you have a complaints procedure?

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
Don't need one	79	84	76	62	68
Never got round to it	5	3	7	10	5
Don't see the point	2	1	3	-	3
It's currently being written	4	2	3	12	20
Other	9	9	9	17	5
No answer	1	1	2	-	-
<b>Base</b>	<b>773</b>	<b>470</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>40</b>

Table 23: Does your organisation receive complaints from service users?

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
Yes	8	5	9	21	25
No	91	94	90	79	73
No answer	1	1	1	-	3
<b>Base</b>	<b>773</b>	<b>470</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>40</b>

Table 24: How many complaints have you had in the last 12 months?

	Total %	Small %	Medium %	Large %	Very large %
None	26	32	37	18	-
1-5	63	59	63	64	70
6-10	3	-	-	9	10
11-14	2	5	-	-	-
15-20	-	-	-	-	-
21-30	2	-	-	9	-
Over 30	-	-	-	-	-
Don't know	3	5	-	-	10
No answer	2	-	-	-	10
<b>Base</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>

## Glossary of terms

In this report, where we use **'must'** we mean it is a specific legal or regulatory requirement affecting trustees or a charity. Trustees must comply with these requirements. We use **'should'** for items we regard as minimum good practice, but for which there is no specific legal requirement. Trustees should follow the good-practice guidance unless there is a good reason not to.

**Charity trustees** are the people responsible under the charity's governing document for controlling the management and administration of the charity (section 97(1) of the Charities Act 1993). They may be called trustees, managing trustees, committee members, governors, or they may be referred to by some other title. In the case of an unincorporated association, the members of the executive or management committee are its charity trustees. In the case of a charitable company, they are the directors.

A **complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction about the standards of service provided by a charity, which an individual user or a group of users claim has affected him, her or them.

For the purposes of this report, we define a **complaints procedure** or a **complaints management system** as:

- a formal document agreed by the trustees that outlines the series of actions and the manner in which they will be conducted (including for example the steps and timescales involved) in the investigation of a complaint; or
- an informally agreed procedure for the way a charity will deal with complaints it receives about its services. It may be recorded, for example, in the minutes of the meeting at which it was agreed.

The Charity Commission's **Independent Complaints Reviewer (ICR)** is the Independent Reviewer to whom Charity Commission customers may complain if they remain dissatisfied having gone through its internal complaints procedure. The ICR has the authority to examine complaints which fall inside the remit of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (the Ombudsman).

An **ombudsman** is an official appointed to investigate individuals' complaints about an organisation's administration, especially that of public authorities. The services provided by ombudsmen are free of charge. Each ombudsman scheme operates under slightly

different rules, but in general an ombudsman does not consider a complaint unless the organisation, business or professional standards body concerned has first been given a reasonable opportunity to deal with it. If the ombudsman decides to conduct a formal investigation, a written report on the investigation will be issued and will normally set out the evidence considered by the ombudsman and proposals for resolving the dispute. If a complaint is upheld, the ombudsman will expect the organisation to provide a suitable remedy.

A **small charity** is defined in terms of its income. For the purposes of this research, if a charity has an annual income of £10,000 or less recorded on our database in its last full financial year, we consider it to be a small charity. Almost 100,000 charities in England and Wales fall into this category.

A **medium-sized charity** is defined in terms of its income. For the purposes of this research, if a charity has an annual income between £10,001 and £250,000 recorded on our database in its last full financial year, we consider it to be a medium charity. Almost 60,000 charities in England and Wales fall into this category.

A **large charity** is defined in terms of its income. For the purposes of this research, if a charity has an annual income between £250,001 and £999,999 recorded on our database in its last full financial year, we consider it to be a large charity. Just over 8,000 charities in England and Wales fall into this category.

A **very large charity** is defined in terms of its income. For the purposes of this research, if a charity has an annual income over £1 million recorded on our database in its last full financial year, we consider it to be a very large charity. Nearly 5,000 charities in England and Wales fall into this category.

A **service** is an act of help or assistance provided by a charity to an individual user or a group of users.

A **stakeholder** is anyone with an interest in a charity. For example, donors, users, staff, volunteers, trustees and people from partner organisations can all be described as stakeholders.

A **user** is anyone who uses or benefits from a charity's services or facilities, whether provided on a voluntary basis or as a contractual service.

## Annex D

### Resources

There are some resources that charity trustees and staff can use to help them in managing complaints. While this is not a definitive or complete list, it does offer a good overview and a useful starting point.

#### The Charity Commission for England and Wales

The Charity Commission produces a wide range of publications and website guidance giving information and advice to charity trustees and the general public on issues relating to charity law, regulation and best practice. The full list of publications is on our website and in our publication CC1, but the list below is a selection based on the issues covered in this report.

#### Charity Commission Publications

CC24 Users on Board: Beneficiaries who become trustees  
CC47 Complaints About Charities  
CC60 The Hallmarks of an Effective Charity  
The Charity Commission and Regulation

To obtain copies of these or any of our publications you can:

- view and print them from our website;
- order during office hours (8.30am–6pm weekdays) by phoning us on 0845 300 0218; or
- write to the Charity Commission, PO Box 8585, Adamsway, Mansfield NG18 9AJ.

#### How to get in touch with us

Contact Centre for general queries and to contact any of our offices:

Telephone: 0845 3000 218

Minicom: 0845 3000 219

Email: [enquiries@charitycommission.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@charitycommission.gsi.gov.uk)

Website: [www.charitycommission.gov.uk](http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk)

Here are the contact details for each of our offices:

#### Liverpool

Charity Commission  
3rd & 4th Floor  
12 Princes Dock  
Princes Parade  
Liverpool L3 1DE

Fax: 0151 703 1555

#### London

Charity Commission  
Harmsworth House  
13-15 Bouverie Street  
London  
EC4Y 8DP

Fax: 020 7674 2300

#### Newport

Charity Commission  
8th Floor, Clarence House  
Clarence Place  
Newport, South Wales  
NP19 7AA

Fax: 01633 225549

#### Taunton

Charity Commission  
Woodfield House  
Tangier, Taunton  
Somerset  
TA1 4BL

Fax: 01823 345003



### **The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA)**

The Advertising Standards Authority is the independent body set up by the advertising industry to police the rules laid down in the advertising codes.

Advertising Standards Authority  
Mid City Place, 71 High Holborn  
London WC1V 6QT

Tel: 020 7492 2222  
Email: [enquiries@asa.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@asa.org.uk)  
Website: [www.asa.org.uk](http://www.asa.org.uk)

### **Arbitration and Conciliation Service (ACAS)**

ACAS is an organisation devoted to preventing and resolving employment disputes.

Head Office  
Brandon House  
180 Borough High Street  
London SE1 1LW

Tel: 020 7210 3613  
Website: [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)

### **Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO)**

ACEVO provides good-practice resources and information on sector issues.

Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations  
1 New Oxford Street  
London WC1A 1NU

Tel: 0845 345 8481  
Email: [info@acevo.org.uk](mailto:info@acevo.org.uk)  
Website: [www.acevo.org.uk](http://www.acevo.org.uk)

### **British and Irish Ombudsmen Association**

The BIOA aims to encourage, develop and safeguard the role and title of ombudsmen, formulate and promote standards of best practice, improve public awareness of recognised ombudsman schemes and encourage their efficiency and effectiveness.

British and Irish Ombudsmen Association (BIOA)  
Secretary  
94 Milner Drive, Twickenham  
Middlesex TW2 7PJ

Tel: 020 8894 9272  
Email: [secretary@bioa.org.uk](mailto:secretary@bioa.org.uk)  
Website: [www.bioa.org.uk](http://www.bioa.org.uk)

### **Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR)**

CEDR is widely regarded as a leading provider of alternative dispute resolution services.

International Dispute Resolution Centre  
70 Fleet Street  
London EC4Y 1EU

Tel: 020 7536 6000  
Email: [info@cedr.co.uk](mailto:info@cedr.co.uk)  
Website: [www.cedr.co.uk](http://www.cedr.co.uk)

### **Charity Commission Independent Complaints Reviewer**

If someone makes a complaint to the Commission and thinks we did not deal with it properly, he or she can put the case to the Independent Complaints Reviewer:

Jodi Berg  
New Premier House (Second Floor)  
150 Southampton Row  
London WC1B 5AL

Tel: 020 7278 6251  
Email: [enquiries@icr.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@icr.gsi.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.icrev.demon.co.uk](http://www.icrev.demon.co.uk)

### **The Charity Complaints Forum**

This body was set up to share best practice and assist in complaints management across the sector. Any charity can become a member. For further information about the Charity Complaints Forum, please contact:

Jane Mason  
Charity Complaints Forum

Tel: 020 7834 6242 x273  
Email: [janem.girlguiding.org.uk](mailto:janem.girlguiding.org.uk)

### **Charity Law Unit**

This department of the University of Liverpool's Law School conducts legal research of the charity sector, including subjects like alternative dispute resolution.

Joan Boardman  
Charity Law Unit  
The Liverpool Law School  
University of Liverpool  
Liverpool L69 7ZS

Tel: 0151 794 3086  
Email: [boardman@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:boardman@liverpool.ac.uk)  
Website: [www.liv.ac.uk/law/clu/index.htm](http://www.liv.ac.uk/law/clu/index.htm)

### Charity Skills

Charity Skills provides a specialist database, telephone helplines, seminars and newsletters for its members in the voluntary sector.

Charity Skills  
PO Box 43520  
London SW15 1WZ

Tel: 0208 785 3327  
Email: [info@charityskills.org](mailto:info@charityskills.org)  
Website: [www.charityskills.org](http://www.charityskills.org)

### Charity Trustee Networks

This charity offers mutual support by encouraging and developing self-help trustee network groups providing cost-effective, peer-to-peer consultancy and mentoring.

Charity Trustee Networks  
PO Box 633  
Godalming GU8 5ZX

Tel: 01428 682252  
Email: [info@trusteenetworks.org.uk](mailto:info@trusteenetworks.org.uk)  
Website: [www.trusteenetworks.org.uk](http://www.trusteenetworks.org.uk)

### Citizens Advice Bureaux

Citizens Advice Bureaux help people with financial, legal and other problems by providing free advice and information and by influencing policymakers.

You can find your local CAB, or make a complaint about a CAB, via [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/contact\\_us.htm](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/contact_us.htm)

### Commission for Social Care Inspection

CSCI is the independent inspectorate for all social care services in England.

Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI)  
33 Greycoat Street  
London SW1P 2QF

Tel: 020 7979 2000  
Customer services helpline: 0845 015 0120  
Email: [enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.csci.org.uk](http://www.csci.org.uk)

### Directory of Social Change (DSC)

The Directory promotes positive social change and provides a wide range of resources for trustees.

<b>London</b> Directory of Social Change 24 Stephenson Way London NW1 2DP Tel: 020 7391 4800	<b>Liverpool</b> Directory of Social Change Federation House Hope Street Liverpool L1 9BW Tel: 0151 708 0117
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Tel (general enquiries): 08450 777707  
Email: (London) [info@dsc.org.uk](mailto:info@dsc.org.uk)  
(Liverpool) [north@dsc.org.uk](mailto:north@dsc.org.uk)  
Website: [www.dsc.org.uk](http://www.dsc.org.uk)

### Ethnic Minority Foundation (EMF)

EMF develops resources for black and minority ethnic organisations. These include networking and training opportunities and a trustee register.

Ethnic Minority Foundation Headquarters  
Boardman House  
64 Broadway  
Stratford  
London E15 1NG

Tel: 020 8432 0000  
Email: [enquiries@emf-cemvo.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@emf-cemvo.co.uk)  
Website: [www.ethnicminorityfund.org.uk](http://www.ethnicminorityfund.org.uk)

### Healthcare Commission

This is the independent inspection body for both the NHS and independent healthcare in England.

Healthcare Commission  
Finsbury Tower  
103-105 Bunhill Row  
London EC1Y 8TG

Tel: 020 7448 9200  
Email: [feedback@healthcarecommission.org.uk](mailto:feedback@healthcarecommission.org.uk)  
Website: [www.chai.org.uk](http://www.chai.org.uk)

### Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS)

ICAS supports patients and their carers wishing to pursue a complaint about their NHS treatment or care. There are no central contact details or website for ICAS, but you should be able to find your local branch through the Department of Health website at [www.doh.gov.uk](http://www.doh.gov.uk)

### The Institute of Fundraising

This is the professional body for UK fundraisers, working to promote the highest standards in fundraising practice and management. In April 2006 they are launching a self-regulation scheme including a 'rigorous complaints process'.

Institute of Fundraising  
Park Place  
12 Lawn Lane  
London SW8 1UD

Tel: 020 7840 1000  
Email: [enquiries@institute-of-fundraising.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@institute-of-fundraising.org.uk)  
Website: [www.institute-of-fundraising.org.uk](http://www.institute-of-fundraising.org.uk)

### Mediation UK

Mediation UK is a national voluntary organisation dedicated to developing means of resolving conflict in communities.

Alexander House  
Telephone Ave  
Bristol BS1 4BS

Tel: 0117 904 6661  
Email: [enquiry@mediationuk.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@mediationuk.org.uk)  
Website: [www.mediationuk.org.uk](http://www.mediationuk.org.uk)

### National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service (NACVS)<sup>39</sup>

This is the national umbrella body of Councils for Voluntary Service in England. A local Council for Voluntary Service provides advice, support and information to voluntary organisations and charities in their area, including help with charity registration. The National Association can put charities in touch with their local CVS.

National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service  
177 Arundel Street  
Sheffield S1 2NU

Tel: 0114 278 6636  
Email: [nacvs@nacvs.org.uk](mailto:nacvs@nacvs.org.uk)  
Website: [www.nacvs.org.uk](http://www.nacvs.org.uk)

### National Consumer Council

The National Consumer Council is the independent voice of consumers in the UK. It deals with issues including complaints and alternative dispute resolution across the public and private sectors.

National Consumer Council  
20 Grosvenor Gardens  
London SW1W 0DH

Tel: 020 7730 3469  
Email: [info@ncc.org.uk](mailto:info@ncc.org.uk)  
Website: [www.ncc.org.uk](http://www.ncc.org.uk)

### National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)

NCVO provides information on fund-raising and governance issues and a range of general support services.

National Council for Voluntary Organisations  
Regent's Wharf  
8 All Saints Street  
London N1 9RL

Tel: 020 7713 6161  
Tel (helpdesk): 0800 2798 798  
Email: [ncvo@ncvo-vol.org.uk](mailto:ncvo@ncvo-vol.org.uk)  
Website: [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk)

### National Governance Hub for England

A group of voluntary and community sector support organisations, working to improve the governance of voluntary and community organisations in England. They produce guidance on best practice.

The Governance Hub  
NCVO  
Regent's Wharf  
8 All Saints Street  
London N1 9RL

Tel: 020 7713 6161  
Email: [governancehub@ncvo-vol.org.uk](mailto:governancehub@ncvo-vol.org.uk)  
Website: [www.governancehub.org.uk](http://www.governancehub.org.uk)

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<sup>39</sup> The National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service (NACVS) is changing its name to the National Association of Voluntary and Community Associations (NAVCA) in June 2006.

### Ofsted

Ofsted, or the Office for Standards in Education, is the inspectorate for children and learners in England, covering childcare, schools, colleges, children's services, teacher training and youth work.

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE

Tel: 020 7421 6800  
Tel (enquiry line): 08456 404045  
Email: [edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

### OSCR

The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator ('OSCR') is the regulator of charities in Scotland and an agency of the Scottish Executive.

OSCR  
1st Floor  
Argyll House  
Marketgait  
Dundee DD1 1QP

Tel: 01382 220446  
Email: [info@oscr.org.uk](mailto:info@oscr.org.uk)  
Website: [www.oscr.org.uk/](http://www.oscr.org.uk/)

### Plain Language Commission

The Plain Language Commission provides accreditation with the Clear English Standard for public documents.

Plain Language Commission  
The Castle  
29 Stoneheads  
Whaley Bridge  
High Peak  
Derbyshire SK23 7BB  
United Kingdom

Tel: 01663 733177  
Email: [mail@clearest.co.uk](mailto:mail@clearest.co.uk)  
Web: [www.clearest.co.uk](http://www.clearest.co.uk)

### Trading Standards Central

Trading Standards Central is a one-stop shop for consumer protection information in the UK. Its website is supported and maintained by TSI, the Trading Standards Institute. See phone books for details of local offices.

Website: [www.tsi.org.uk](http://www.tsi.org.uk)

### The United Kingdom Parliament

The United Kingdom Parliament website provides information about the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

Website: [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk)

### VolResource

This internet-only resource for charities offers quick links to useful organisations concerned with the effective running of charities.

Email: [info@volresource.org.uk](mailto:info@volresource.org.uk)  
Website: [www.volresource.org.uk](http://www.volresource.org.uk)

### Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)

This organisation represents the interests of and campaigns for voluntary organisations, volunteers and communities in Wales. It provides a comprehensive range of information, consultancy, funding, management and training services.

Welsh Council for Voluntary Action  
Baltic House  
Mount Stuart Square  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff CF10 5FH

Tel: 0870 607 1666  
Email: [help@wcva.org.uk](mailto:help@wcva.org.uk)  
Website: [www.wcva.org.uk](http://www.wcva.org.uk)

### Journals, magazines and newspapers

Charity Finance  
3 Rectory Grove  
London SW4 0DX

Tel: 020 7819 1200  
Email: [rcoley@charityfinance.co.uk](mailto:rcoley@charityfinance.co.uk)  
Website: [www.charityfinance.co.uk](http://www.charityfinance.co.uk)

Charities Management  
Mitre House Publications  
154 Graham Road  
Wimbledon  
London SW19 3SJ

Tel: 020 854 27766  
Website: [www.charitiesmanagement.com](http://www.charitiesmanagement.com)

#### Charity Times

Tel: 020 7426 0496 / 0123

Website: [www.charitytimes.com](http://www.charitytimes.com)

#### The Corporate Citizenship Company

This company provides an overview and round-up of current issues, largely through case studies.

Email: [mail@corporate-citizenship.co.uk](mailto:mail@corporate-citizenship.co.uk)

Website: [www.corporate-citizenship.co.uk/publications](http://www.corporate-citizenship.co.uk/publications)

#### Governance

This bi-monthly journal is aimed at charity trustees, their chief executives and company secretaries.

[www.charitygovernance.co.uk](http://www.charitygovernance.co.uk)

#### Network Wales

Contact WCVA for details

#### The Guardian

The *Society* section in The Guardian is particularly useful.

Website: [www.SocietyGuardian.co.uk](http://www.SocietyGuardian.co.uk)

#### Third Sector

Tel: 020 8606 7500

Email: [subscriptions@haynet.com](mailto:subscriptions@haynet.com)

Website: [www.thirdsector.co.uk](http://www.thirdsector.co.uk)

#### The Times

The *Public Agenda* section in The Times is particularly useful.

Website: [www.timesonline.co.uk](http://www.timesonline.co.uk)

#### Voluntary Sector

Contact NCVO for details – see above.

## Annex E

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