

CONSULTATIONS GRATUITES
Compliments and Complaints
Policy and Procedure

1. Our Aim

Consultations Gratuites is committed to providing a quality service and working in an open and accountable way that builds trust and respect. One of the ways in which we can continue to improve our service is by listening and responding to the views of our clients and stakeholders, and in particular by responding positively to complaints, and by putting mistakes right.

Therefore we aim to ensure that:

- making a compliment or complaint is as easy as possible
- we welcome compliments, feedback and suggestions
- we treat a complaint as a clear expression of dissatisfaction with our service which calls for an immediate response
- we deal with it promptly, politely and, when appropriate, confidentially
- we respond in the right way - for example, with an explanation, or an apology where we have got things wrong, or information on any action taken etc.
- we learn from complaints, use them to improve our service, and review annually our complaints policy and procedures

We recognise that many concerns will be raised informally and dealt with quickly.

Our aims are to:

- resolve informal concerns quickly
- keep matters low-key
- enable mediation between the complainant and the individual to whom the complaint has been referred

This policy ensures that we welcome compliments and provide guidelines for dealing with complaints from members of the public about our services, facilities, and volunteers.

Consultations Gratuites in an unincorporated association of pro bono legal advisers. It does not employ staff and it doesn't have a management team. Clinics are run by volunteer advisers. The Administrators of the association are not responsible for the advice given.

Consultations Gratuites' contact details are:

- **In person: The Crypt, St Mary's Church, Upper Street, London N1 2TX (Thursdays 19:00 to 20:00 only, except holidays periods)**
- **By email: consultgratuiteslc@gmail.com**

(please note that we do not give any legal advice by email)

2. Definitions

A compliment is an expression of satisfaction about the standard of service we provide.

A complaint is defined as any expression of dissatisfaction, however, it is expressed. All volunteers should have sufficient knowledge to be able to identify an “expression of dissatisfaction” even when the word “complain” or “complaint” is not used.

3. Purpose

We are always glad to hear from people who are satisfied with the services we offer. All compliments are recorded and acknowledged and feedback passed on to the relevant volunteer.

4. Complaints

The formal complaints procedure is intended to ensure that all complaints are handled fairly, consistently and wherever possible resolved to the complainant's satisfaction.

5. Responsibilities

Consultations Gratuites responsibility will be to:

- acknowledge the formal complaint in writing;
- respond within a stated period of time;
- deal reasonably and sensitively with the complaint; and
- take action where appropriate.

A complainant's responsibility is to:

- bring their complaint, in writing or in person, to Consultations Gratuites' attention to our address of business or by email normally within 8 weeks of the issue arising;
- raise concerns promptly;
- explain the problem as clearly and as fully as possible, including any action taken to date;
- allow Consultations Gratuites a reasonable time to deal with the matter, and
- recognise that some circumstances may be beyond Consultations Gratuites's control.

6. Confidentiality:

Except in exceptional circumstances, every attempt will be made to ensure that both the complainant and Consultations Gratuites maintain confidentiality. However, the circumstances giving rise to the complaint may be such that it may not be possible to maintain confidentiality (with each complaint judged on its own facts). Should this be the case, the situation will be explained to the complainant.

7. Complaints Procedure:

Written records must be made by Consultations Gratuites at each stage of the procedure.

Stage 1

In the first instance, the volunteer who receives the complaint (but who is not the subject of the complaint) must establish the seriousness of the complaint. An informal approach is appropriate when it can be achieved. But if concerns cannot be satisfactorily resolved informally, then the formal complaints procedure should be followed.

Stage 2

If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, the member of the public should be advised that a formal complaint may be made and the following procedure should be explained to them. It may sometimes be appropriate for a different volunteer to make this explanation.

- a) A formal complaint can be made either verbally or in writing. If in writing the attached form should be used. If verbally, a statement should be taken by any volunteer present at our place of business (provided he/she is not named in the complaint).
- b) In all cases, the complaint must be passed on to a named volunteer who is not named in the complaint
- c) The named volunteer must acknowledge the complaint in writing within one week of receiving it.
- d) The named volunteer will investigate the complaint. Any conclusions reached should be discussed with another volunteer (not named in the complaint).
- e) The person making the complaint will receive a response based on the investigation within four weeks of the complaint being received. If this is not possible then a letter must be sent explaining why.

Stage 3

- a) If the complainant is not satisfied with the above decision, then two volunteers not named in the complaint or involved in stages 1 and 2 will be named (stage 3 volunteers).
- b) The stage 3 volunteers will examine the complaint and may wish to carry out further interviews, examine files / notes. They will respond within four weeks in writing. Their decision will be final.

8. Taking your complaint outside Consultations Gratuites:

If you are not satisfied with our final response, you may take your complaint to the Legal Ombudsman.

Generally, you can ask the Legal Ombudsman to look at your complaint if you are referring your complaint within either:

- Six years of the problem happening; or
- Three years from when you found out about it (if it took place more than six years ago).

You need to bring your complaint to the Legal Ombudsman within six months of our final response. If your complaint does not meet these time limits, they may not be able to investigate it

<https://www.legalombudsman.org.uk/?portfolio=complaint-form-legal>

Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA)

The solicitors employed within Consultations Gratuites are required to comply with their regulatory obligations and in particular the Solicitors Code of Conduct; Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) Practice Framework rules 2011 and SRA Handbook.

Solicitors Regulation Authority, The Cube, 199 Wharfside Street, Birmingham, B1 1RN

Tel: 0370 606 2555

<https://www.sra.org.uk/home/contactus.page>

**CONSULTATIONS GRATUITES
COMPLAINTS FORM**

You may use this form to make a suggestion or to make a complaint about Consultations Gratuites.

We would like you to return this form as soon as possible.

Your Name

Address

.....

Telephone

Date of incident

Approximate time of incident

Suggestion / Complaint

What action would you like to be taken?

What times are convenient for you to have an appointment to discuss this?