



Queen Margaret University

CONSUMER DISPUTE RESOLUTION
CENTRE

Public Services Complaint Management Award – additional information

Course aim

The aim of the course is to provide the skills, knowledge and understanding required to deliver excellent public services complaint management. This overall aim is supported by three learning outcomes (the outcomes we expect you to have achieved following successful completion of the course). By the end of the course you should be able to:

- Understand and apply the theory, principles and practice of complaint resolution in order to deliver quick, fair and proportionate complaint outcomes.
- Develop a broad understanding of the theory, principles and practice of complaint investigation and apply these in order to deliver robust, well-reasoned and persuasive decisions on complaints.
- Use your knowledge of the theory, principles and practice of complaint remedy to develop your professional skills and deliver meaningful outcomes for consumers and improvements to public services.

The course consists of some preparatory self-study, two days of training, followed by an 8 week period in which an assignment is prepared for assessment. The course includes the following content:

Day 1

Conflict and complaint behaviour: This session begins by looking at theories of conflict. Complaints are often underpinned by deeper concerns and, until these are resolved and underlying conflict is addressed, achieving resolutions is unlikely. We also look at consumer complaint behaviour and address what complainants want when they complain, what they expect and what makes it more likely that a satisfactory resolution can be achieved.

Complaint definition and triage: Initially we will look at how complaints should be defined and consider the importance of framing to subsequent complaint processes and outcome. This session then considers the various options available to complaint handlers to resolve complaints. We will look at the issue of 'redress design' and the idea

that complaint handlers should take a 'horses for courses' approach. We will also look at how should complaints be triaged and assessed to determine which are suitable for 'resolution' and which need a more forensic 'investigation'?

Attempting resolution: Having surveyed the approaches complaint handlers might adopt when looking at complaints, we will focus on negotiated forms of dispute resolution such as negotiation and mediation. We look at the potential for using these in their 'pure' form within complaints processes, but our focus will be on what complaint handlers can learn from these approaches to help improve their ability to achieve quicker, more satisfactory and longer lasting resolutions to complaints. Case study exercises will be used to help students apply skills in practice.

Investigation planning: Defining the parameters of an investigation, setting the frame and scoping the investigation are key skills for investigators. Without a strong plan, investigations can go badly wrong. This session uses a case study approach to help students develop good scoping and planning skills.

Day 2

Gathering evidence: Asking the right questions is vital to ensuring that investigations are conducted efficiently and proportionately. They are also vital to ensure the fairness of an investigation process. This session looks at evidence types, sources and gathering methods. Its particular focus is on questioning and interviewing skills, introducing students to techniques for holding 'investigative conversations'.

Evaluating evidence: This session seeks to encourage students to develop a more rigorous and thorough approach to the evaluation of evidence. This involves making good judgements about the relative weight of evidence and understanding concepts such as reliability, credibility and sufficiency. Again, the theory will be applied in practice with reference to case study materials.

Root cause analysis: Investigations sometimes identify that the organisation did something wrong, but often do not get to the bottom of why that is the case. This session introduces various tools for conducting root cause analysis and ensuring that problems are prevented from recurring following investigations.

Individual remedy: This session looks at how complaints can be remedied for complainants. The focus is on explanations, apologies and tangible forms of redress. The session uses the 5-Ps Model to examine the process of explanation. We will look in this session at the circumstances in which apologies are appropriate and how and when to make effective apologies. Finally, we will consider the debate around financial redress in public services and how public service ombudsmen have addressed the question. We will also consider other forms of tangible redress.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact us at cdrc@qmu.ac.uk We look forward to hearing from you.